



The Effect of Front-Desk Roleplay in Enhancing Hospitality Students' Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of front-desk roleplay in enhancing hospitality students' speaking skills at the vocational high school level (SMK). The research employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, involving thirty (30) hospitality major students who participated in the front-desk roleplay treatment. Data were collected using speaking skill tests administered before and after the treatment. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistic and statistical analysis such as paired sample t-test and effect size. The results showed significant improvement in hospitality students' speaking skills after the implementation of front-desk roleplay treatment. The mean scores of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency increased from 3.53 to 3.90, 3.26 to 3.96, 3.46 to 3.86, and 3.23 to 3.86, respectively. Paired sample t-test also demonstrated a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores with p-value less than 0.05, with effect sizes ranging from 0.5 to 1.5, indicating moderate to large effects of the treatment on students' speaking performance. Therefore, front-desk roleplay treatment can be considered an effective learning strategy for improving students' speaking skills. By using front-desk roleplay, students engage in simulated real-life hotel scenarios that make the learning process more meaningful, create authentic learning experiences, and align with the actual communication demands of the hospitality industry.

Keywords: front-desk roleplay, speaking skills, hospitality student

Pengaruh Roleplay Resepsionis dalam Meningkatkan Keterampilan Berbicara Mahasiswa Perhotelan

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh *roleplay* resepsionis dalam meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara siswa jurusan perhotelan di tingkat SMK. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain pre-eksperimental satu kelompok pretest–posttest, yang melibatkan siswa jurusan perhotelan. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan tes kemampuan berbicara yang diberikan sebelum dan sesudah perlakuan (*treatment*), kemudian dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan statistik seperti uji t sampel berpasangan dan besaran efek. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam kemampuan berbicara murid perhotelan setelah penggunaan *roleplay* resepsionis. Nilai rata-rata pengucapan, kosakata, tata bahasa, dan kelancaran meningkat masing-masing dari 3,53 menjadi 3,90; 3,26 menjadi 3,96; 3,46 menjadi 3,86; dan 3,23 menjadi 3,86. Uji t sampel berpasangan menunjukkan adanya perbedaan yang signifikan antara nilai pra-uji dan pasca-uji ($p < 0,05$), dengan ukuran efek berkisar antara 0,5 hingga 1,5 yang termasuk kategori sedang hingga besar. Dengan demikian, *roleplay* resepsionis dapat dinyatakan efektif dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara siswa. Mereka dapat secara aktif terlibat dalam simulasi praktik pekerjaan perhotelan yang sesungguhnya sehingga proses pembelajaran menjadi lebih bermakna, menghadirkan pengalaman belajar yang autentik, serta selaras dengan tuntutan komunikasi profesional dalam industri perhotelan.

Kata kunci: roleplay resepsionis, keterampilan berbicara, mahasiswa perhotelan

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of *hospitality*, based on the word “host,” developed during ancient times when the Greeks welcomed guests with respect and care (Handayani et al., 2024). Today, hospitality refers to friendliness, sincerity, and a willingness to assist others (Prabandari et al., 2023). Hospitality is one of the majors offered in vocational high schools (SMK), where students are prepared to work in hotels and related industries. In this context, students learn English as a practical tool to perform their future job responsibilities, in line with the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach that connects language learning with professional needs (Dwinalida & Setiaji, 2022). Among various hotel departments, the front office is typically one of the most visible areas of a hotel and may be considered the “face” of the hotel. It is the place where English language is often used for daily transaction and communication purposes especially when providing service to an international guest (Namtapi, 2022).

Despite English being essential for achieving success in hospitality careers, many hospitality students still experience difficulties in speaking English. Several factors influence these challenges. First, foreign language anxiety (the fear of making a mistake), inhibits spontaneous speech and limits students’ capacity to organize ideas. Second, limited vocabulary as a result of little exposure to meaningful context also limit students’ language production. Third, low self-esteem discourages students from participating actively in speaking activities. Lastly, classroom practices which lack contextualization do not provide adequate opportunity for students to practice communicating through language (Ananta et al., 2024; Aryani et al., 2025; Pan & Zhong, 2022).

In order to address these problems, an instructional approach that includes providing authentic, practical and interactive speaking opportunities is required. Front-desk roleplay offers a contextualized learning environment that simulates real hospitality situations, allowing students to simulate practical communications task that reflect the actual front office duties. For

example, one student may act as a receptionist and the other as a guest. By engaging students in realistic communicative tasks, front-desk roleplay has the potential to decrease students’ anxiety, enhance their vocabulary usage, and ultimately improve their overall speaking abilities. Based on the outlined problem above, the research question can be stated as follows “*Does using front-desk roleplay have any effect on vocational high school hospitality students’ English speaking skills?*” More specifically, this current study aims to examine the effectiveness of front-desk roleplay in enhancing the ability of hospitality students to speak.

The result of this study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical values. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) studies in vocational high schools, particularly in tourism and hospitality programs that prepare students for careers in hotels and related industries, by examining the use of front desk roleplay to enhance speaking skills. Practically, it offers hospitality English teachers an alternative interactive teaching method, helps students improve their speaking competence and confidence in professional situations, and serves as a reference for future researchers conducting similar studies in different contexts.

Those expected contributions are supported by previous findings on the effectiveness of roleplay in English learning. Research has shown that when students participate in role playing exercises they tend to demonstrate greater improvement in their ability to communicate in English language than students who learn in a non-role play instructional setting (Dwiyanti & Lolita, 2023), and it can also enhance students’ confidence through a safe and supportive learning environment (Dimastoro & Bharati, 2022). Similarly, international research demonstrates the positive effects of role-playing on the speaking abilities of hospitality students in Vietnamese universities (An & Ly, 2023), and the speaking abilities of Jordanian EFL learners (Rababah, 2025).

In line with the research problem, expected contributions, and previous findings discussed



above, the use of front-desk roleplay is also theoretically supported by constructivist and experiential learning theories. Constructivism emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and meaningful experiences, which aligns with student-centered speaking activities where students practice real hotel communication tasks (BADA & Olusegun, 2015). Likewise, experiential learning theory highlights learning through direct experience and reflection (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Through front-desk roleplay, students engage in concrete hospitality scenarios, reflect on their performance, and gradually improve their communicative competence. Thus, this strategy is not only practically relevant to ESP and future workplace needs but also firmly grounded in established learning theories.

While numerous studies have investigated the effect of roleplay in general English learning, this study focuses on professional hotel situations that students are likely to face in the workplace. As a result, this study provides new insights into designing learning strategies such as front-desk that align with ESP frameworks and prepare students with the practical communication skills needed to succeed in their future careers within the hospitality industry. For all of these reasons, this study titled “The Effect of Front-Desk Roleplay in Enhancing Hospitality Students’ Speaking Skills,” is crucial.

METHODS

This study utilized a pre-experimental research design with one group pretest-posttest model. There is only one single group experiment. A pre-experimental design is used to evaluate the effect of a specific intervention by comparing data collected before and after the treatment (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Yuni et al., 2023; Razak, 2017). This research design is highly beneficial for analyzing the influence of learning strategy, such as the application of front-desk roleplay on improving the English speaking skills of hospitality students, as it provides clear insights into the effectiveness of the learning method.

The research procedure started with a pre-test, continued with a treatment, and ended with a post-test. This study was conducted at Lumajang Vocational High School, located at Jl. Gajah Mada, Kepuharjo, Lumajang Regency, East Java Province. This research took place during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The sample for this study consists of 30 tenth grade hospitality students. These 30 students include 21 males and 9 females.

The research instrument used in this study was a speaking test validated by an English lecturer. Both the pretest and post-test contained oral speaking tests in the form of front desk situational prompts to measure students’ speaking ability before and after receiving the treatment. The treatment consisted of structured front-desk roleplay activities conducted during the learning process. In this treatment, students were paired with another student to act as receptionist and the other as a guest. The roleplay topics included welcoming guests, handling the check-in and check-out process, and giving directions within the hotel area.

The questions used in the pre-test and post-test were designed to reflect typical front desk communication tasks. They required students to respond orally to situational prompts related to introducing themselves as a receptionist, greeting newly arrived guests, assisting with check-in and check-out procedures, and providing directions to hotel guests. The questions are presented as follows:

- 1) How would you introduce yourself to a guest?
- 2) What would you say to greet a newly arrived guest?
- 3) How would you assist a guest during the check-in process?
- 4) What would you say to help a guest check out?
- 5) How would you provide directions to a hotel guest?

To measure students’ improvement, a speaking assesment rubric was used. According to the rubric developed by Brown (2007) the four key areas of

speaking include vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency (Katemba & Grace, 2023). A 5-point Likert scale was utilized for the speaking rubric, which assesses vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. The speaker was assessed based on each area using a rating system ranging from poor (rating 1), fair (rating 2), average (rating 3), good (rating 4) and excellent (rating 5).

Tabel 1
 Speaking Rubric

No.	Component	Assessment	Score
1	Vocabulary	Uses accurate and varied expressions suitable for welcoming guests, handling reservations, and giving directions	5
		Uses appropriate front desk terms with minor word choice errors	4
		Uses basic front desk vocabulary but lacks variation.	3
		Uses limited vocabulary that often causes misunderstanding.	2
		Unable to use appropriate vocabulary during front-desk roleplay	1
2	Grammar	Grammatical errors are quite rare	5
		Most grammar is used accurately with only a few mistakes	4
		Makes numerous grammatical mistakes, but the meaning is still understandable	3
		Frequent errors that disrupt communication with guests	2
		Sentences are mostly incorrect and difficult to understand	1
3	Pronunciation	Pronunciation is very clear and easy to understand	5
		Clear pronunciation, few mistakes	4
		Pronunciation is still understandable even though it is influenced by the first language	3
		Makes frequent mispronunciations, and the listener must often guess the meaning	2
		Pronunciation is very unclear, hard to understand	1
4	Fluency	Responds quickly and confidently in front desk situations	5
		Speaks smoothly with slight hesitation.	4
		Needs some time to respond but maintains interaction	3
		Frequently pauses and struggles to continue conversation	2
		Unable to maintain conversation flow	1



analysis were analyzed using SPSS software version 27 to determine if there is a statistically relevant increase in students' speaking abilities as a result of the use of the front desk roleplay treatment. If the p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) of the paired sample t-test is smaller than 0.05, this means that front-desk roleplay treatment has a significant effect on the English speaking abilities of the hospitality students. Effect size was also used to measure the extent of the treatment's impact. According to Cohen's d guidelines, an effect size of 0.2–0.49 is considered small, 0.5–0.79 is considered medium, and 0.8 or higher is considered large, meaning the treatment has a stronger practical impact on the outcome (Goulet-pelletier & Cousineau, 2018).

RESULT

1. Pretest Hospitality Students' Speaking Skills Score

Pretest scores are presented in a table per component. The presentation also includes the mode for each component.

Tabel 2
 Hospitality Students' Speaking Skills Pretest Score

No.	Sampel Code	Score per Component				Total	Percent
		Pronunciation	Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency		
1	913	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
2	917	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
3	906	4	3	4	4	15	75,00
4	908	4	4	4	3	15	75,00
5	916	4	4	4	3	15	75,00
6	918	4	3	4	4	15	75,00
7	919	4	3	4	4	15	75,00
8	929	4	3	4	4	15	75,00
9	930	4	4	3	4	15	75,00
10	901	4	4	3	3	14	70,00
11	902	4	3	4	3	14	70,00
12	904	4	3	4	3	14	70,00
13	905	4	4	3	3	14	70,00
14	910	3	4	4	3	14	70,00
15	914	3	4	3	4	14	70,00
16	920	3	4	4	3	14	70,00
17	923	4	3	4	3	14	70,00
18	911	3	4	3	3	13	65,00
19	915	4	3	3	3	13	65,00
20	921	3	3	4	3	13	65,00
21	922	4	3	3	3	13	65,00
22	927	4	3	3	3	13	65,00

23	903	3	3	3	3	12	60,00
24	907	3	3	3	3	12	60,00
25	924	3	3	3	3	12	60,00
26	925	3	3	3	3	12	60,00
27	926	3	3	3	3	12	60,00
28	928	3	3	3	3	12	60,00
29	909	2	3	3	3	11	55,00
30	912	3	3	3	2	11	55,00
	Mean					13,6	68,00
	Category						low
	Mode	4	3	3	3		

2. Post-test Hospitality Students' Speaking Skills Score

Posttest scores are presented in a table per component. The presentation also includes the mode for each component.

Tabel 3
Hospitality Students' Speaking Skills Post-test Score

No.	Sampel Code	Post-test Score per Component				Total	Percent
		Pronunciation	Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency		
1	913	5	4	4	5	18	90,00
2	929	5	4	4	5	18	90,00
3	930	5	4	5	4	18	90,00
4	901	4	4	5	4	17	85,00
5	904	4	4	4	5	17	85,00
6	905	4	5	4	4	17	85,00
7	908	4	5	4	4	17	85,00
8	917	4	4	4	5	17	85,00
9	920	4	5	4	4	17	85,00
10	927	5	4	4	4	17	85,00
11	902	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
12	906	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
13	910	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
14	914	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
15	918	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
16	919	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
17	921	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
18	925	4	4	4	4	16	80,00
19	907	3	4	4	4	15	75,00
20	922	4	4	4	3	15	75,00



21	923	4	4	4	3	15	75,00
22	926	4	4	3	4	15	75,00
23	903	4	4	3	3	14	70,00
24	911	3	4	3	4	14	70,00
25	915	4	3	4	3	14	70,00
26	928	3	4	4	3	14	70,00
27	909	3	3	4	3	13	65,00
28	916	3	3	3	4	13	65,00
29	924	3	4	3	3	13	65,00
30	912	3	3	3	3	12	60,00
	Mean					15,6	78,00
	Category						high
	Mode	4	4	4	4		

3. The Effect of Receptionist Roleplay on Hospitality Students' Speaking Skills

Posttest scores are presented in a table per component. The presentation also includes the mode for each component.

Table 4
 Pretest-Posttest Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive								
	pronun- pretest	pronun- posttest	vocab- pretest	vocab- posttest	gram- pretest	gram- posttest	fluen- retest	fluen- posttest
Mean	35.333	39.000	32.667	39.667	34.667	38.667	32.333	38.667
N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Maximum	04.00	05.00	04.00	05.00	04.00	05.00	04.00	05.00
Minimum	02.00	03.00	03.00	03.00	03.00	03.00	02.00	03.00
Sum	106.00.00	117.00.00	98.00.00	119.00.00	104.00.00	116.00.00	97.00.00	116.00.00

In line with the explanation above, the descriptive statistics table here also show consistent improvement from pre-test to post-test scores. The mean score of pronunciation increased from 3.53 to 3.90, vocabulary from 3.26 to 3.96, grammar from 3.46 to 3.86, and fluency from 3.23 to 3.86. The minimum and maximum scores in the post-test are generally higher than those in the pre-test, indicating a clear improvement in students' speaking performance.. This shows a clear improvement in students' speaking performance after the treatment.

The standard deviations in both pre-test and post-test are relatively comparable and do not show extreme differences, suggesting that the data distribution is sufficiently homogeneous. Therefore, after examining the descriptive results and confirming the homogeneity of the data, the analysis proceeds with a paired sample test to determine whether the differences between pre-test and post-test scores are statistically significant.

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
pretest	0,179	30	0,015	0,932	30	0,055
posttest	0,197	30	0,004	0,932	30	0,057

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 5
Paired Sample Test

Paired Samples Test							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	pronun_pretest - pronun_posttest	-.36667	.55605	.10152	-3.612	29	.001
Pair 2	vocab_pretest - vocab_posttest	-.70000	.46609	.08510	-8.226	29	.000
Pair 3	gram_pretest - gram_posttest	-.40000	.67466	.12318	-3.247	29	.003
Pair 4	fluen_pretest - fluen_posttest	-.63333	.55605	.10152	-6.238	29	.000

Based on the table above, all of the value of sig. (2-tailed) for pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency were less than 0.05. This means that the front-desk roleplay treatment has a statistically significant effect on hospitality students' speaking skills.

Table 6
Effect Sizes

			Standardizer ^a	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Pair 1	pronun_pretest - pronun_posttest	Cohen's d	.55605	-.659	-1.050	-.259
		Hedges' correction	.56338	-.651	-1.037	-.256
Pair 2	vocab_pretest - vocab_posttest	Cohen's d	.46609	-1.502	-2.021	-.970
		Hedges' correction	.47223	-1.482	-1.995	-.958
Pair 3	gram_pretest - gram_posttest	Cohen's d	.67466	-.593	-.977	-.200
		Hedges' correction	.68355	-.585	-.965	-.197
Pair 4	fluen_pretest - fluen_posttest	Cohen's d	.55605	-1.139	-1.595	-.671
		Hedges' correction	.56338	-1.124	-1.574	-.663



The table presents the effect size results for the differences between pre-test and post-test scores across the four speaking components. The interpretation is based on the Cohen's *d* point estimates. The effect size for pronunciation ($d = 0.659$) indicates a moderate effect. Vocabulary shows a very large effect ($d = 1.502$). Grammar demonstrates a moderate effect ($d = 0.593$). Fluency also shows a large effect ($d = 1.139$).

Overall, all components demonstrate moderate to large effect sizes, indicating that the front-desk roleplay treatment had a meaningful and practically significant impact on students' speaking performance across pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency.

DISCUSSION

The results show that the use of front-desk roleplay significantly improved the speaking skills of tenth-grade hospitality students. The mean score of pronunciation increased from 3.53 to 3.90, vocabulary from 3.26 to 3.96, grammar from 3.46 to 3.86, and fluency from 3.23 to 3.86. The outcomes of this research further support the idea that front-desk roleplay is an effective strategy for teaching front office materials to hospitality students.

This improvement can be theoretically explained through constructivist and experiential learning perspectives. Both theories have been used to support the idea that learning is an active process that develops through active involvement, social interaction, and direct experience. Through front-desk roleplay, students practiced language in realistic hospitality scenarios and learned by doing. As a result, they were able to gain a deeper knowledge of English usage in authentic hotel situations while improving their spoken English performance beyond mere memorization.

In addition, the results from the current research study also correlate with several previous studies. Nirwani et al. (2024) found that roleplay

effectively developed students' ability to handle hotel reservations based on national standards (SKKNI). Similarly, Maharani et al. (2024) reported that roleplay significantly improved vocational students' English communication skills by engaging them in relevant and contextualized interactions. It is mentioned that roleplay was very useful for vocational students, who typically learn best through contextualized and practice-based learning methods. Melyawati et al. (2022) also concluded that roleplay enhanced students' learning outcomes in telephone reservations for front-office subject and helped them use appropriate language in real communication tasks. Taken together, these previous studies strengthen the present findings by demonstrating that front-desk roleplay creates meaningful and authentic learning experiences for hospitality students. It helps them to practice professional communication in a manner that is truly meaningful to them and therefore will aid in improving their speaking performance in hospitality settings.

Despite these positive results, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The study included only a small sample size and was completed within a relatively short period. It was also carried out and focused solely in one major, which is hospitality. These factors may affect the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts.

CONCLUSION

These scores from table 2 and table 3 are based on the hospitality student's answers to five front desk situation prompts provided during the pretest and posttest sessions :

1. Introducing themselves to a guest

In the pre-test, many students introduced themselves using extremely simple and incomplete expressions such as "I receptionist" or "My name ... receptionist here," with unclear pronunciation and limited structure. Most students provided more suitable introductions after completing the

treatment, for example by saying, “Good morning, my name is ... and I am the receptionist on duty today. How may I assist you?” Their sentences also became more structured and polite.

2. Greeting a newly arrived guest

Before the treatment, students often used short greetings such as “Hello” or “Welcome,” without further follow-up. In the post-test, they added polite expressions and service-oriented language, such as offering assistance or asking about reservations.

3) Handling the check-in process

Many hospitality students failed to describe the check-in procedure clearly during the pretest. The students’ responses in the pretest were typically brief, and did not include key vocabulary related to reservations, identifying guests, or room information. After participating in front-desk roleplay treatment, they were able to describe the check-in procedures more logically and use more appropriate hospitality terms.

4. Assisting with the check-out process

In the beginning, students experienced significant difficulty forming complete sentences in describing how guests would be billed for services, or confirm departure arrangements. In the post-test, their responses became more organized and communicative, even though minor grammatical errors were still present.

5. Giving directions within the hotel

In the pre-test, students often directed guests to destinations using very short directions such as “Go there” or “Second floor,” without clear guidance. After the treatment, most students were able to provide more detailed instructions of how to get from one destination to another including using more varied hospitality term and better sentence structure.

Based on the research results and discussion outlined above, it can be concluded that the use of front-desk roleplay has a positive impact in enhancing hospitality students’ speaking skills.

Students’ speaking skills improved significantly compared to their initial speaking skills. In the pre-test, many hospitality students were unable to articulate words clearly and struggled due to influence of their native language, which affected their pronunciation. When asked to respond to front desk situations such as handling check-in, check-out, and giving directions, they were not able to give complete and effective responses due to limitations in their vocabulary. Their responses were usually very short and contained several grammatical errors. Furthermore, many students hesitated and paused repeatedly during their speech, resulting in reduced fluency.

After participating in the front-desk roleplay activities, students showed noticeable progress. They demonstrated better articulation and intonation, and were able to use longer and more varied vocabulary. Their responses also became more complete and appropriate. Although some grammatical errors were still found, their speech was generally understandable. In terms of fluency, most students were able to speak more smoothly and confidently. Overall, front-desk roleplay significantly helped hospitality students’ improved their speaking skills.

These findings also directly address the problems identified at the beginning of this study. The use of contextual and realistic front desk scenarios helped reduce foreign language anxiety by providing opportunities to practice in a supportive environment. The activities also enriched students’ vocabulary through meaningful communication, increased their self-confidence, and provided real communicative experiences that were previously limited in classroom practice. Therefore, front-desk roleplay can be considered an effective strategy to break the cycle of anxiety, limited vocabulary, low confidence, and minimal speaking practice that negatively affects hospitality students’ speaking performance.



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