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Theme-Based Instruction (TBI) Through Role-Play To Teach Students Of The Hospitality Program In Speaking Activities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of Theme-Based Instruction (TBI) through role-play speaking activities by teachers for students in the hospitality program at a vocational high school in Surabaya. A qualitative method was employed through two meetings, during which data were collected using observation checklists and a speaking scale. The first meeting focused on the implementation process led by the teacher, while the second meeting assessed the students' performance after the implementation. The results show that TBI through role-play significantly helps teachers in developing students' speaking skills through real-life contexts and increasing their interest in learning English. This study contributes to the theoretical development of TBI and role-play, which recommends further interdisciplinary research using comparative tools for a deeper understanding of TBI and role-play implementation.

Keywords: Theme-Based Instruction (TBI), Role-Play Performance, Speaking Skills, Hospitality, Vocational High School.

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INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most important international languages and is widely used in global communication. In many countries, including Indonesia, English is categorized as a foreign language (EFL), meaning that learners typically acquire it through formal education rather than through natural exposure. However, despite years of study, the overall English proficiency of Indonesian learners remains relatively low. The English Proficiency Index (EPI) 2017 ranked Indonesia at a low level, showing that learners cannot often communicate effectively in English (Poedjiastutie et al., 2018). This insufficient proficiency is evident in both pronunciation and comprehension, which significantly hinder communication. According to Isadaud et al. (2022), Indonesian students often feel hesitant to speak English, face difficulties in understanding and pronouncing words, and lack the confidence to use English spontaneously in genuine interactions.

These challenges are more critical for vocational high school students, especially those in the hospitality program. Graduates of vocational schools are expected to be immediately ready for the workforce upon graduation (Nasihin et al., 2022). However, many of them are unable to use English confidently when communicating with foreign guests. For instance, some graduates rely heavily on translation applications during fundamental workplace interactions because they lack self-confidence and sufficient speaking ability. This mismatch between the demands of the hospitality industry and the actual competencies of graduates highlights an urgent need for effective teaching methods that can bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace communication.

To overcome these challenges, researchers and educators have proposed various approaches to teaching speaking. One promising approach is Content-Based Instruction (CBI), which integrates language learning with subject-matter content. CBI provides learners with authentic materials and meaningful contexts, enabling them to acquire language skills while engaging with relevant themes (Brown & Bradford, 2016). Brinton and Snow (2003) identify three models of CBI: theme-based instruction, sheltered instruction, and adjunct instruction. Among these models, Theme-Based Instruction (TBI) is considered the most suitable for vocational settings, as it allows teachers to design lessons around themes directly connected to students' professional fields (Yugandhar, 2016; Eryansyah, 2024).

Additionally, TBI can be effectively combined with interactive techniques, such as role-play. Role-play encourages students to engage in simulated real-life situations, fostering their confidence, fluency, and collaborative skills (Tandipayuk et al., 2023; Romadhona et al., 2023). In the context of hospitality education, role-play provides an opportunity for students to practice authentic dialogues, such as handling guest complaints, providing services, or giving directions. These activities not only make learning more engaging but also prepare students to handle communication challenges in the workplace.

Despite its potential, previous studies on TBI still present some limitations. Waluyo (2019) investigated the use of TBI to improve communicative competence, focusing on learners with relatively high English proficiency, such as exchange students. His study emphasized the use of general themes without specifying particular classroom activities or contextual tasks. Consequently, the findings do not provide clear insights into how TBI can be effectively applied to beginner-level learners who struggle with low motivation, lack of confidence, and limited speaking skills. Moreover, there is limited research that combines TBI with role-play activities in the vocational hospitality context, where English communication is an essential job requirement.

This gap is significant because vocational students in the hospitality field face unique challenges. They need to use English for professional purposes immediately after graduation, yet many lack the opportunity to practice English in authentic situations during their studies. By focusing on specific, job-related themes and applying them through role-play, teachers can provide students with both linguistic input and practical experience. Such an approach is expected to enhance their confidence, fluency, and accuracy in speaking English.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to address the research gap by exploring the implementation of TBI through role-play in a vocational high school hospitality program. The research focuses on two main objectives: (1) to describe how teachers implement TBI through role-play activities using situation cards related to hotel problems, and (2) to evaluate the students' speaking performance after participating in these role-play activities. By doing so, this study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of combining TBI and role-play for improving speaking skills among beginner-level vocational learners, as well as offering practical implications for English teachers in similar contexts.

METHODS

In collecting the data for this research, the researcher employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a case study design. The researcher chose this approach because the research focuses on investigating a specific case within the context of implementing TBI through role-play activities, to improve students' speaking performance in a vocational high school hospitality program. Through this approach, the researcher aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the teaching process and students' performance during role-play activities. The setting of this research was a vocational high school in Surabaya with a focus on hospitality as its major. The subjects of this research consisted of 35 tenth-grade students, who were involved in the 2024/2025 academic year.

To collect the data, the researcher used observation. The instrument used to collect data consisted of an observation checklist, video recordings, and a speaking scale, which the researcher adapted

from Brown (2004). While analyzing the data, the researcher utilized the analysis technique outlined by Miles & Huberman (1994), which involves data reduction, data display, and concluding.

RESULTS

After collecting the data throughout the entire observation process, the results were divided into two categories based on the two research questions that the researcher posed for this study.

1. The Implementation of Theme-Based Instruction (TBI) Through Role-Play

In the process of implementing TBI through role-play activity based on the lesson plan, the researcher conducted this teaching activity through two meetings. In the first meeting, the researcher highlighted the process of implementing the role-play, from explaining the material and dividing the students into groups, to explaining the situation card as the learning task. Then, students were asked to create a script, and finally, they practiced with their groups.

Based on the findings, the researcher differentiated each of the meetings into two parts. In the first meeting, the students were introduced to the material by the teacher through a discussion of hotel-related problems, divided into groups, and assigned tasks such as writing scripts and planning their performances. During the first meeting, the researcher focused on group collaboration, idea development, and preparation for role-play performance. In the second meeting, Students were asked to present their prepared role-play to the class. At the same time, the teacher played a role in assessing their speaking performance in terms of fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension. Unlike the first meeting, which focused on the preparation process, the second meeting evaluated the students' speaking skills through a live performance, followed by direct feedback from the teacher.

Those are the explanations for the first research questions that the researcher provided based on the process of each meeting. The implementation of TBI through role-play is effective in supporting the teaching of students in the hospitality program, particularly in developing speaking skills. This activity helps students increase their collaboration and speaking ability by focusing on topics related to their major. However, the teacher assistant and repeated practice should be enhanced to minimize students' weaknesses in mastering vocabulary, time allocation, and self-confidence.

2. **The Students' Role-Play Performance**

After implementing theme-based instruction (TBI), the second research question focuses on students' performance during the role-play activity. Based on the data collected through the observation checklist and the speaking scoring rubric, the students' speaking performance when theme-based instruction (TBI) is used through role-play activities showed various levels of achievement.

The observation checklist revealed that students' participation and performance varied across groups (see appendices: students' score results). Group 5 demonstrated the highest level of performance by fulfilling all the observation criteria, including equal role division, active discussion, effective time management, confident presentation, clear pronunciation, and the use of appropriate props. In contrast, Group 4 showed moderate results, meeting most but not all the criteria, whereas Group 1 indicated poor performance due to incomplete participation and inadequate preparation.

a. Level Good

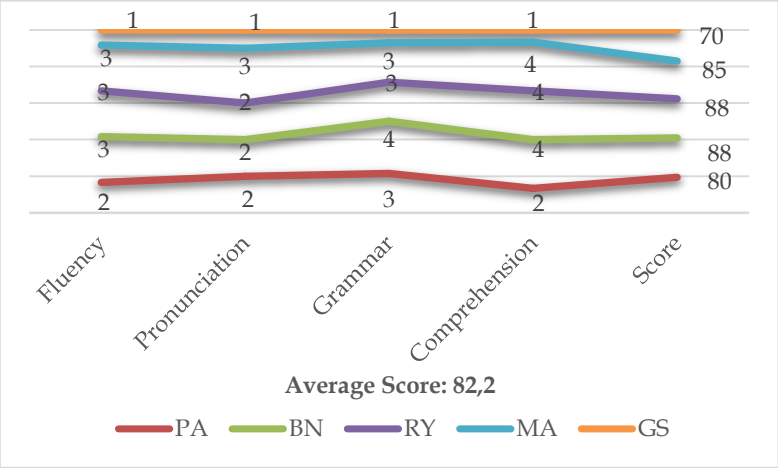


Figure 1

Group 5 Speaking Result

From the result above, the students in Group 5 demonstrated high proficiency in almost all aspects of their speaking skills. Based on their results in the speaking scale observation, the highest average scores were observed in comprehension and grammar structuring abilities, enabling them to choose appropriate and relevant vocabulary for the given topic. Next, their fluency during their dialogue delivery was considered fair but still high. Meanwhile, their pronunciation results indicate that Group 5 performs fairly at a low level. During the feedback and giving suggestions at the end of the meeting, the teacher asked the students to use a louder voice, act out, and practice to reduce mistakes and gain speaking confidence.

b. Level Moderate

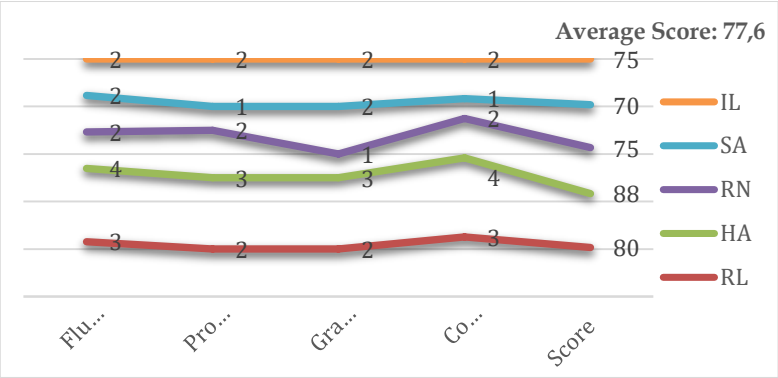


Figure 2

Group 4 Speaking Result

From Figure 2 above, Group 4 portrayed a moderate speaking ability. The highest average score demonstrated their fluency in delivering dialogue, staying on topic, and vocabulary comprehension. Then, pronunciation and grammar followed, with identical average scores at a low level, which need much practice since there are many errors. At the end of their performance, the teacher provides feedback and suggestions, encouraging RN and SA to perform with more passion and energy to make their role-play performance more engaging for the audience. All group members were reminded to practice their dialogue more to avoid forgetting lines during the performance. Try to practice pronouncing some of the English vocabulary, and use a louder voice when speaking their lines.

c. Level Poor

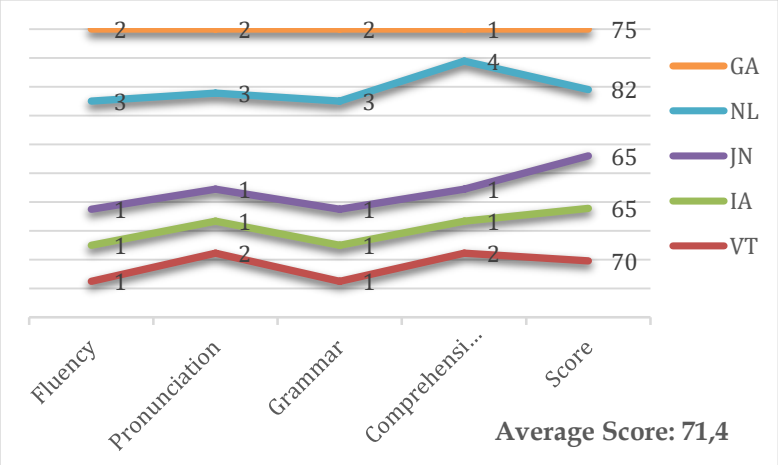


Figure 3

Group 1 Speaking Result

Based on their speaking rubric, Group 1 showed difficulties in delivering their dialogue during their role-play performance. All of their speaking scores are at a low average level. Ranked from the highest score based on the speaking rubric for this group, their result showed that their pronunciation and comprehension abilities could be considered at a fair to low level. Meanwhile, fluency and grammar still demand significant improvement and practice. The teacher provided extensive feedback regarding their preparation and delivery of dialogue. Some students need to use a louder voice and try to perform confidently, while preparing well through collaboration and good teamwork.

The results suggest that using TBI through role-play activities effectively encouraged students to speak English in a realistic hospitality-related context. However, not all the students' performance results showed equal scores. Several factors influencing these differences include group collaboration, self-confidence, vocabulary mastery, and preparation during rehearsals. Students with higher scores tended to be more engaged during script development and practice sessions and showed a high willingness to speak without relying on scripts.

DISCUSSION

1. The Implementation of Theme-Based Instruction (TBI) Through Role-Play

The findings showed that the implementation of TBI through role-play was carried out in three main stages: pre-activity, while-activity, and post-activity. The three learning stages align with Scott & Ytreberg (1990), Eryansyah (2024), and Pertiwi (2019), who confirmed that theme-based instruction (TBI) becomes more meaningful when the selected themes are relevant to the students' real-life contexts. In this study, the researcher chose the material based on the students' major, specifically a hospitality program.

In the pre-activity, the teacher opened the lesson with greetings, followed by a brainstorming session, and then introduced the topic of the learning. This stage is important in creating the context and students' motivation, which aligns with Dörnyei (2001) about motivational theory, which argues that giving clear learning objectives with contextualized tasks can increase student learning engagement. Another study from Muljani & Suwartono (2020) Found that designing a clear, relevant, and realistic introduction could engage students in their speaking activities.

The while-activity is the main stage where students work in groups to create scripts, practice dialogue, and perform. This follows Kolb (1984), Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of learning through hands-on experiences. A recent study by Tandipayuk et al.

(2023) reports similar findings on role-play activity, which gives a positive impact on speaking fluency, confidence, and collaborative skills in hospitality or tourism education contexts. Other studies from Romadhona et al. (2023) supported the use of role-play using real-life scenarios, which can help students develop their interaction with their peers

The last one is the post-activity, which enables the process of giving feedback and suggestions for their performance. The teacher provided constructive suggestions, which helped students identify and improve their strengths and weaknesses. It is aligned with the practice, which Qadri et al. (2023) confirmed that giving feedback and peer reflections could reduce the students' anxiety and help them improve their performance.

Although the implementation was mostly successful in helping students learning speaking through role-play, some challenges were also found. First is the time limitation for practice. It is crucial to provide students with additional time during their role-play preparation. The extra time could help students build their self-confidence and memorize the dialogue, which they need for their roles. These difficulties align with research from Kaharuddin & Rahmadana (2020), which indicates that role-playing requires careful control in maintaining how the students work on their tasks. Hence, they can give their best during their performance. To strengthen the statement, a study by Bandura (1971), based on Social Learning Theory, explains that sufficient practice time can help students build their self-confidence and efficacy. Another problem that occurred during the implementation was that the teacher did not check the students' attendance during the pre-activity. Even though it looks like a minor gap, (Farhang et al. (2023) emphasizes that providing consistent classroom procedures, as outlined in the lesson plan, can contribute to effective learning and ensure that no student is left behind in achieving the learning objectives.

The findings align with a study from Wicaksana et al. (2020) that role-play activity could help teachers in teaching speaking activities to vocational high school students more effectively, since the chosen material is based on the context.

2. Students' Speaking Performance

The findings also revealed different levels of speaking performance among the students, namely good, average, and poor. The highest-performing group showed a notable improvement in vocabulary comprehension and grammatical accuracy. This supports Bloom's Taxonomy, which provides a relevant framework for analysing students' cognitive and language performance (Bloom et al., 1956).

The students who performed well tend to be collaboratively active during the preparation stage in creating their scripts, and help each other during the performance. These results confirm the findings of Putra & Sekewael (2025) that reported the use of TBI, combined with role-play, helps increase the students' confidence and fluency in their speaking.

However, some groups showed lower scores in fluency and pronunciation. These students often felt hesitant and relied heavily on their scripts during the performance, which made their performances difficult to understand. Highlight that while the role-play increases students' engagement, it should also be paired with explicit pronunciation and grammar practice to help them build stronger language skills. Additionally, another aspect that influenced the students' performance was the dynamics of the group. Groups that collaborated well generally achieved better results than those that struggled with a lack of motivation or failed to share responsibility equally in their collaborations. This supports Vygotsky et al. (1978) Social Constructivism emphasizes that learning is a social process and that peer interaction is a valuable tool to help students enhance their performance.

Ultimately, the students' speaking performance in this study demonstrates that TBI through role-play is effective in developing the students' speaking skills at vocational high school. However, additional suggestions, such as providing extra practice, improving group management, and explicitly focusing on speaking aspects in drills, are recommended to help students improve their weaknesses and ensure more balanced improvement for all students.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the implementation of Theme-Based Instruction (TBI) through role-play successfully created an interactive learning environment that connected students' academic needs with real-world contexts relevant to the hospitality industry. The students' speaking performances demonstrated that TBI, through role-play, is an effective strategy for developing speaking skills in a vocational high school setting, particularly for students in the hospitality program. Overall, the use of TBI through role-play significantly supported the teacher in teaching speaking skills by incorporating real-life scenarios into the learning process. This approach not only improved students' speaking abilities but also increased their interest and engagement in learning English

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on beginner-level vocational learners, who typically have low confidence and limited speaking ability. Unlike previous studies that applied TBI with general themes or higher-proficiency students, Waluyo (2019) strengthened this study by specifically applying role-play with job-related situations using a situation cards approach, providing practical exposure to real-world hospitality communication, making it more relevant to their field.

Therefore, this study contributes to both theory and practice by demonstrating how TBI combined with role-play can bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace communication. It highlights that tailored themes and authentic role-play activities can significantly improve vocational students' speaking performance and motivation to use English in professional contexts.

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