Promoting Authentic Interaction: Investigating Student-Generated Role Play For Pragmatic Skills Development In Indonesian Vocational Efl Students

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Abstract

This article examines the use of role-play in teaching pragmatic skills to the vocational students with the aim of promoting authentic interaction from Indonesian vocational students of English as a foreign language (EFL). The investigation adopts a qualitative perspective, as it recognizes the constraints of pre-set scripts in cultivating context-specific communication skills, by analyzing how student-generated role play in diverse contexts may cultivate pragmatic attunement and facilitate participation. Students in the fourth semester of an English for Tour and Travel class worked together to design workplace communication tasks based on video models and real-life experiences. Research data included classroom observations, video recordings of students' performances, and post-project interviews. It is found that the students progressed in the use of speech acts, politeness strategies, and turn taking in spoken interactions. These roles play activities enabled not only improvised speech practice and peer feedback but also provided an opportunity for language learners to reflect cultural norms and communication intentions. The research reinforces the importance of moving away from static textbook discussions to the dynamic real-world tasks that approximate actual use of the language. It points to the need for the inclusion of pragmatic competence in speaking instruction, especially in vocational EFL contexts where work-related communication and sociopragmatic awareness are important.

INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly interconnected world, effective and successful communication across diverse cultural and social settings is critical, especially for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). As this language becomes the dominant global lingua franca, the expectation extends beyond mere grammatical knowledge and vocabulary acquisition; learners must also be adept at using the language appropriately in various contexts. This view is reinforced by (Wahyuningsih & Ziyana Untsa, 2023) who highlight the essential role of English in reducing global communication barriers, specifically within the domains of education and business. This is especially true in countries such as Indonesia, where graduates of vocational programs, particularly in tourism and hospitality, frequently engage in major interpersonal encounters.

Despite its importance, many language classrooms continue to prioritize structural competence over pragmatic and intercultural communication skills. Such an approach does not adequately prepare students to negotiate the complexities of real-world interactions. This emphasizes the need for enhanced English communication proficiency among tourism personnel to facilitate effective interactions in the globalized economic landscape, aligning with the sentiments expressed in the literature on tourism education (Gan, 2024). Xu advocates for integrating intercultural communication competence into foreign language education, arguing that learners must be equipped with the relevant

attitudes, knowledge, and skills to interact appropriately across cultural boundaries (Xu, 2024).

The importance of teaching pragmatics in the classroom is crucial to the students' communicative competence. It also improves their skills in the appropriate use of language in various social circumstances. It allows students to go beyond just grammar and vocabulary, so they communicate more effectively and appropriately in shared social contexts. It also decreases the likelihood of the misunderstanding that frequently arises as a result of language users realize expressions that are grammatically accurate but socially inappropriate. Further supporting the importance of cultural awareness, (Yao & Du-Babcock, 2023) point out that intercultural business communicative competence needs to precede explicit language instruction. Understanding cultural context, they suggest, is essential for effective interaction, and thus language training should embed sociocultural awareness. Enhancing students 'pragmatic and cultural awareness equips them to interact successfully across diverse cultural settings. Through development of cultural pragmatic competence and pragmatic awareness in foreign language programs, students can be helped to be more competent in manoeuvring different intercultural contexts successfully (Hu & Navarrete, 2024).

In addition, the teaching of cultural awareness and pragmatic sensitivity in the classroom helps learners to understand how something can be polite, assertive or respectful in one culture and social situation, and not in another. Without a sensitivity to this, learners might inadvertently violate cultural norms which results in "errors" due to misunderstandings, ruptured relationships and offence, despite language production being grammatically correct. For example, what you can ask directly good and a polite culture may be rude and blunt in another. Recent research emphasizes the need for incorporating sociopragmatic elements into language education. In this way, students not only improve their language skills but ready themselves for the complexities of intercultural conversation. According to Jamil and Mahmood (2023) and Nazlı (2016) pedagogies emphasizing the relationship between language and its social milieu can greatly develop learners' pragmatic consciousness, also their ability to interact effectively in a social context. In line with this idea, Wijayanti and Budi (2021 implemented speaking tasks with the socio-pragmatic focus which enriched students' language function selections and facilitated them to choose context suitable utterances. Incorporating a curriculum that emphasizes cross-cultural pragmatic competence is therefore vital. Bardis et al. ((Bardis et al., 2021)) advocate for the use of authentic materials and culturally-oriented activities in classroom settings, as these align well with the communicative language teaching approach by promoting active engagement and the practical application of pragmatic strategies in meaningful contexts. Similarly, another researcher suggests employing techniques such as cultural contrast teaching and task-based learning to heighten awareness of cultural pragmatics throughout the educational process, ensuring that learners are better equipped to navigate diverse social landscapes (Liu, 2020). In conclusion, developing cultural pragmatic competence in students demands a comprehensive approach that integrates experiential learning, focused instruction, and cultural immersion. By employing strategies such as explicit teaching of pragmatic norms, engaging in authentic interactions, and fostering intercultural sensitivity, educators can prepare their students for successful communication in a globalized world.

Growing cultural awareness is an important accomplishment in language learning since it gives students the sensitivity as well as the tools to negotiate often unfamiliar social norms, and, therefore, to escape cross-cultural blunders. Cultural awareness refers to the understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities. Teaching students about cultural expressions can avoid misunderstandings and help create positive relationships. Cappelli et al., (2018) and Beauchamp et al., (2023) have shown that culturally aware learners tend to perform better in multicultural settings, as they can recognize and respond to the subtleties of social interactions. For instance, becoming familiar with differing expressions of politeness across cultures enables learners to adapt their communicative strategies accordingly (Pamungkas & Wulandari, 2020). Furthermore, enhancing learners' cultural sensitivity has been found to be crucial in fostering their communicative competence, particularly in foreign language learning settings where intercultural interaction is involved (Klimova et al., 2019). In sum, integrating cultural awareness into language education is not only beneficial but essential in preparing learners to navigate communication effectively in broader contexts.

To address these limitations, the present study seeks to transition from conventional, scripted dialogues to more realistic and pragmatically oriented role play activities. While scripted conversations allow for controlled language practice, they often fail to capture the complexity, fluidity, and sociocultural nuances of authentic communication. Previous studies have predominantly concentrated on general EFL contexts, with limited research exploring the development of pragmatic competence within Indonesian vocational education settings. In contrast, engaging learners in role play scenarios that mirror real life, contextually relevant situations enable them to use language not only with grammatical accuracy but also with social and cultural appropriateness. By focusing on key pragmatic elements such as turn taking, politeness strategies, speech acts, and contextual awareness, this approach provides learners with essential skills to navigate authentic interactions effectively, particularly in professional and multicultural environments.

This article reports an attempt to design and to utilize role-play tasks that are based on everyday interactional problems. The goal is to raise learners' pragmatic awareness about norms within various contexts and cultures, and to develop intercultural sensitivity, as well as to ensure a more realistic and interactive language learning. In addition, the investigation aims to address the paucity of context-specific and practical models for teaching pragmatics in EFL contexts, particularly in Indonesia, by providing classroom-based pragmatics teaching activities that are easy to implement by teachers who lack access to resource materials or formal instruction in pragmatics.

METHOD

This research was a qualitative case study that aimed at revealing the ways in which authentic role-play could develop fourth semester students of English for Tour and Travel class to have pragmatic awareness at a state Polytechnic in East Java, Indonesia. The study was conducted in the academic year 2024–2025, and concentrated on speech acts for dealing with customer complaints, a crucial element of communication in tourism and hospitality.

The main data for this study derived directly from student performances and reflections, making it for the most part primary source, supplemented by cursory secondary

data such as course outlines that provide background information about the instructional environment. Thirty-seven students, who participated in a 120-minute practicum session weekly, participated in the study. These students provided key information via their performance in role play stimuli and group interviews.

The research started with the identification of typical communication situations in tourism and hospitality (esp. complaint handling) and the design of authentic role-play situations. Students were guided to collaborate and produce scripts based on authentic workplace situations and video clips. In class, they role-played these scenarios in small groups while being observed and recorded.

To collect rich qualitative information, the study used two main methods: audio-video of role-play performances (students' employment of pragmatic strategies in action) and group interviews carried out after the role plays, with students discussing their language use, cultural aspects and what they found challenging.

The interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (Miles, Mattew B., Huberman, A Michael., Saldana, 1994), applied to the context of the classroom, was considered for data analysis. All data was subjected to transcription by listening to the conversations several times. The researcher then carried out data reduction by selecting the speech acts, politeness strategies, and context-based language use relevant to pragmatic competence. During data display, these excerpts were organized thematically into charts and narrative summaries to identify patterns of how students enacted various social norms and communicative expectations. The findings was one of the patterns that were used for the analysis of the drawing and checking of conclusions, so that we could interpret how the completed activities contributed to students' socio-pragmatic awareness. The results were validated through a return to the recordings and a peer reviewer was consulted in order to increase credibility.

By means of these systematically prepared stages, this research managed to capture how students were exposed to pragmatic features in authentic, real life communicative situations and to gain an insight into the efficacy of authentic role-play as a pragmatic development tool in an EFL vocational environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

Practical pragmatic competence can be promoted through role-plays, which increase learners' opportunities to engage in face-to-face

communication. When role play shifts its emphasis from the script accurately to the relevance of the context and effective conversation, it can help to develop this communicative competence working in other places situation. Role-play activities usually stress on being mostly scripted dialogues which may restrict learners through a more natural language use and real -life context (Zughaibi, 2022). Viewed in terms of a pragmatics perspective, teachers can use the vehicle of role-play exercises in which students can engage themselves in improvised and contextually responsive practices. This prompts learners to analyze their language critically, and corresponds to the dynamic use of language in social context (Chen, 2023). The students need to be immersed in genuine situations, reproducing interaction in the real world, fostering spontaneous language and communication. Ultimately, teachers are essential to enhancing the relevance and

engagement of classroom activities. This can be attained by means of a different number of steps, such as designing context-rich role-play scenarios, collaborative learning and encouraging improvisation, providing clear models of pragmatic language use and facilitating reflection and feedback sessions. These approaches are fun and they make this classroom interaction meaningful, and students are more likely to adopt these pragmatic rules.

The first was designing context-rich role-play scenarios that grounded in reality, in stunted social situations complete with cultural nuances and power dynamics. To support this, the teacher introduced situations commonly encountered in the tour and travel as well as hospitality industries (e.g. complaints about late service, booking mistakes, unacceptable rooms). The situations proved to give students validity and to learn how to utilize the use of suitable language strategies when dealing with customers dissatisfaction at work.

Booking Error
A family books a hotel room with a sea view, but upon arrival, they are given a room facing the parking lot. They complain because the hotel did not honor the room type they paid for. The family is disappointed and feels their expectations have been let down by the travel agency that made the reservation

Delayed Airport
TransferTourists arrive late at the airport, but the arranged transfer to their hotel is delayed by over an hour. They are tired after a long flight and upset about the wait, feeling the service provided by the tour operator is unreliable and unprofessional.

Unsatisfactory Accommodation
Guests find that their hotel room is not clean and the air conditioning is not working properly. Despite prior assurances from the booking agent, the room does not meet the promised standards. The guests express frustration and demand a solution or compensation.

Overbooked Tour
A sightseeing tour was overbooked, and some tourists were denied seats on the bus. The affected customers are disappointed because they paid in advance and expected a guaranteed spot. They complain to the tour company about poor management and demand a refund or alternative arrangements.

Figure 1. Handling Complaint Situations

Similarly, by means of authentic contexts such as the above situations (figure 1), teachers can also assist learners to recognize the appropriateness of their language. Giving context information of the social scene additionally helps learners to make interpretations and to adhere to the norms of the pragmatics (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2019). This idea is also in line with Kuang and Bicchieri's perspective (Kuang & Bicchieri, 2024). They emphasize that the linguistic expression of norms significantly influences how people perceive and comply with those norms. In conclusion, enhancing learners' awareness of contextual cues and pragmatic norm is fundamental in cultivating effective and socially appropriate communication.

The next step following formulating context-laden role-play scenarios was collaborative learning and fostering improvisation. During this stage the teacher split the students into groups and gave them all an individual scenario to experiment with and re-enact. This grouping structure affords students the opportunity to collaborate, share options for language, and practice responses using the context provided. In a study conducted by Kim & Taguchi (2016) it was shown that that the employment of work groups provides many opportunities for students to exchange ideas, to interact and to use language. These kinds of interactions not only develop linguistic ability, but also create socialization of pragmatic features necessary for communication.

Excerpt 1

"I felt more engaged with the assignment when the lecturer presented us with real-world scenarios, such as trouble arranging a trip or hotel guests complaining. It felt like we were getting ready for what would actually occur in a work, not just a role-play. I began to consider more which expressions would be appropriate in each occasion."

Excerpt 2

"It was more fun and less monotonous working together. We shared ideas and we corrected each other. At times my friends would recommend kinder or more professional ways to say something. It enlightened me, discussing those situations together."

Excerpt 3

"I like that we didn't have to memorize a script. The teacher let us switch up the lines as long as they were polite and fit. It forced me to think on my feet and to be natural. "At first I was really embarrassed and shy, but I felt better and less awkward, the more I practiced improvising and actually used English in real scenarios."

The reflections indicate that such context-rich, collaborative, and improvisational role-play tasks that students were able to relate the classroom learning to real-world contexts. When students engage in peer collaboration, they are able to revisit their language, correct mistakes and strategies to improve communication (Chiu et al., 2022). This kind of exchange provides students an opportunity to develop their improvisational skills without the pressure of using the language in real life(Kontra, 1996). This collaborative nature of roleplay positively influences the students 'language learning experiences, leading to improved social interactions(Alzubi et al., 2024).Thus, incorporating collaborative and improvisational role play into language learning helps students improve their language skills and get ready to communicate well in different real-life situations.

After collaborative learning and encouraging improvisation, the teacher gave explicit models of practical language demonstrating, through specific instances, what was proper use of the language and how to use it in a real situation. In this step, the teacher played an important role in selecting and showing videotaped episodes that focus on specific pragmatic skills (e.g., request-making, apology, complaint). These video models allow students to see how native/fluent speakers modify their intonation, facial expressions and body gesture based on the social context. The utilization of authentic content in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context is critically important for enhancing students' language acquisition and communication skills, as it helps them follow expressions more easily when exposed to real-life language use (Wijayanti & Miqawati, 2022).

Excerpt 1:

"Watching the videos was really helpful for me to get a feel for how to speak in an authentic sort of way. I could hear how the speakers' tone or body language shifted upon giving an apology or handling a complaint. It taught me that communication is more than grammar it's how you say things."

Excerpt 2:

"I used not to feel secure about what words to use in different occasions, but these video examples made it clearer. I liked that we could talk about the scenes in class and grow from them. It was so nice to get a taste of real English, not just phrases that I learned in my textbook."

The addition of video examples to pragmatic instruction greatly improved students' understanding of how languages work in authentic social contexts. Students were able to move from memorized language and into more natural use of context appropriate language by listening to real people use polite speech and apply their communication styles.

The final step was the organization of reflection and feedback sessions where students had the chance to reflect upon their role-play performance, to think about the aspects that had been done well and those that would need to be improved. This approach increased learners' pragmatic language consciousness, consolidated learning, and supported ongoing progress, receiving positive peer and teacher feedback.

Peer Evaluation Worksheet: Role-Play Performance

Evaluator's Name: _____
Date: _____
Scenario: _____

1. Did your friend handle the complaint effectively? Explain how or why not.

_____

2. What polite expressions or strategies did your friend use during the role-play?

_____

3. How well did your friend adapt their language to the context of the situation?

_____

4. What could your friend improve to make their response more effective?

_____

5. What did you like most about your friend's performance?

_____

Figure 2. Peer Evaluation Worksheet

The following rubric in Figure 2. was given to each group by the teacher in order that the group to assess the performance of their class peers in the role play. Students as they practice from this short-answer worksheet are observed of their abilities to manage complaints, use polite language, and change their implementation depending on the situation. This task encourages both critical thinking and reflection, and allows students to internalize their peers' successful strategies.

Excerpt 1:

"I paid more attention during my friends' performance by doing the worksheet. I focused on how they handled that complaint and if their language was polite and easy to understand. It reminded me of identifying what I can do better in my own speaking as well."

Excerpt 2:

> "Feedback to my group members were enjoyable to me. It was like we were learning together, not just performing. While writing what they did well or could improve on, I also noted down how I can be more careful with my own language during role play."

It is crucial to evaluate how well students incorporate politeness strategies, analyzing their use of indirect requests, hedging, and formal language as necessary. A study shows that in spite of the variation in politeness awareness between cultures; after providing feedback in politeness, students develop their pragmatic performance in intercultural communication proficiency (Monaghan et al., 2021). Structured feedback session is also essential in supporting the development of students' pragmatic competence. It is in line with research result conducted by Järvelä and Rosé (Järvelä & Rose, 2022). Role playing activities in technology-enhanced collaborative learning environments help strengthen learners' sense of responsibility and teamwork. These conditions motivate students to reflect on their performance and apply feedback effectively to improve their language use (Järvelä & Rose, 2022). Shankar et al. also show that adding feedback to the scenarios helps students reflect on their experiences and better understand different viewpoints, which improves their understanding of real-world situations like those in medical humanities(Shankar et al., 2012). In conclusion, providing structured feedback during role playing activities plays an important role in helping students improve their pragmatics skills and communicate more effectively across cultures.

In sum, context-rich, collaborative, and multi-phases role-plays along with authentic video models and structured peer feedback emerged as a successful means to strengthen students' pragmatic competence. By enabling students to relate with dimensions of pragmatic language through real-time interactive activity and promoting peer-production and reflection, teachers can foster a deeper awareness of pragmatic use.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that context-rich, improvisational, and collaborative role-play tasks need to be incorporated into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching so as to further students' pragmatic competence in vocational contexts like tourism and hospitality. Students are more likely to process and memorize applicable language production strategies and acquire communicative sensitivity in multiple social situations when practicing language that simulates everyday transactions (e.g. complaints) rather than practicing "presentations" that they would simply research, write and then deliver.

One of the key insights about language learning is that when language learning becomes less about scripted dialogue and more about improvisational exchanges of language in scenarios, students become much more adept at using the language in more spontaneous and socially responsive ways. With this change, students may concentrate on selecting language that suits the situation and the individuals they are speaking with rather than just memorizing the sentences. Their ability to adapt their tone, manners, and facial expressions to tiny social cues is enhanced as students participate in increasingly complex, real-life simulations. As a result, they gain self-confidence and sensitivity to manage a variety of communication scenarios they may face in real situations.

In particular, the integration of improvisation in language instruction has been shown to promote an environment which encourages spontaneous language production,

promoting increased participation and self-efficacy. According to the research carried out by Míguez-Álvarez, process drama can be defined as an improvised method, and it empowered pre-service teachers to speak naturally and communicate spontaneously in the language learning classroom (Míguez-Álvarez, 2024) . Participants felt that they had more confidence to express themselves without being intensely worried about others' judgment, decreased anxiety and clearer lines of communication. This collaborates with the findings of Zondag et al.'s report that storytelling as an improvisational activity had a positive influence over English student teachers' confidence in spontaneous speaking (Zondag et al., 2020). Activities like this help learners to negotiate meaning within conversation, enacting linguistic forms in a meaningful social context, and enhancing the students' pragmatic competence.

In general, the incorporation of pragmatic competence in role-play tasks represents an improvement on the controlled speaking exercises in that it is a departure from scripted practice to more dynamic, real-life communicative practice. By integrating real-life, context-rich scenarios; emphasizing communication through engaging activities; and focusing on task-based, collaborative learning, students are inspired to use language in the same way that professionals do in their various fields of work. Video models, peer feedback, and reflective discussion also extend pragmatic awareness, supporting learners to adjust their communication strategies to different social and cultural signals. Not only does this improve their speaking skills but provides them with the necessary oral skills required to negotiate the working world, especially in an environment such as the tourism or hospitality sector, which rely on effective and polite communication.

CONCLUSION

This study points out the importance of moving beyond scripted dialogues toward more meaningful, realworld interactions in EFL classrooms. Engaging in role plays rooted in everyday and culturally relevant situations allows students to use English not just correctly, but naturally and confidently. These activities foster greater awareness of social norms, enhance intercultural sensitivity, and encourage critical reflection especially when paired with collaboration and guided discussion.

Such integrated pragmatic instruction enhances learners' ability to use polite, and spontaneous language, as well as prepares them for complex interchanges that occur within work settings. This flexible model presents a workable solution for teaching pragmatics in EFL, aimed especially at vocational education. Ultimately, fostering pragmatic competence is essential for preparing learners with the communicative skills necessary to succeed across diverse social and cultural landscapes in real-world interactions. This model enhances learners' pragmatic competence for workplace communication, especially in vocational contexts. Using different teaching methods can help students better understand how culture affects language. Karlik explains that knowing cultural values and norms is key to understanding how language works in communication(Karlik, 2023). Therefore, future studies may further examine how Indonesian cultural norms influence pragmatic choices, contributing to more culturally responsive EFL curricula.

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