



Developing Service Excellence Skills through the Guest Teacher Training Program at Vocational High School

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Abstract: One crucial competence for vocational school (SMK) students to enter the business, industry, and job sectors (DUDIKA) as a skill-based school is service excellence. The purpose of this activity and training is to enhance students' skills in implementing the concept of service excellence as a form of best service for customers. The activity was attended by 107 students and 8 teachers. The method used is qualitative, not only serving as knowledge dissemination to the community through education but also integrating input from the school through interviews, documentation, and complete participatory observation, where the author will be fully involved in what the students are doing, along with documentation. The training method employed is the Active Learning Class. The findings reveal that students experienced an improvement in understanding and skills in providing excellent service.

Keywords: Guest Teacher, Service Excellence, SMK, Training, Vocational School

Introduction

In the increasingly competitive business environment, service excellence has become a critical factor that distinguishes successful organizations from others. Modern consumers not only seek quality products or services but also demand exceptional customer experiences. The ongoing globalization in the service sector has prompted companies across various industries to prioritize customer satisfaction through outstanding service quality, commonly referred to as service excellence (Gouthier et al., 2012). Service excellence is defined as the best service in meeting customer expectations and needs (Setiawati & Aji, 2023). It encompasses various aspects, including responsiveness to customer needs, accuracy, speed, and human interactions that build positive relationships.

Service excellence is a crucial element in achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty. It is essential for businesses to prioritize service quality and ensure that customer expectations are consistently met or even exceeded (Ng & Henderson, 2021). By delivering exceptional service, companies can differentiate themselves from competitors and enhance customer retention. Implementing service excellence is vital as it is a significant contributor to competitive advantage in any business environment (Ariffin et al., 2018).

One of the key arguments underlying the importance of service excellence is the dominant role of customers in the long-term success of an organization. Customers appreciate the concept of service excellence as a company's willingness to facilitate business transactions (Johnston, 2004). Modern customers are not merely passive consumers but also key players in determining the direction of business. They have increasingly high expectations regarding service quality and the overall experience provided by a company. Therefore, companies need to exert maximum effort by delivering an outstanding customer experience, surpassing expectations, and ensuring customer satisfaction (Lukman & Vegetama, 2023).

Delving into the concept of service excellence is necessary even before entering the workforce. The younger generation today must understand the concept of service excellence well as preparation for the future when interacting with various people, whether as customers or as members of society (Tee & Chaw, 2021). Therefore, the importance of introducing the concept of service excellence at the primary to secondary education levels, especially in Vocational High Schools (SMK), cannot be denied. Education is the primary foundation in shaping the character and skills of human resources, and early exposure to service excellence is key to creating a younger generation with not only technical knowledge but also essential interpersonal skills in the workplace. The SMK level is expected to produce a generation that is independent in the future (Nugrahaningsih et al., 2023). As a vocational education institution, SMK has a significant responsibility in preparing its students for the demands and dynamics of future industries.

Involving vocational school students in understanding the concept of service excellence provides a strong foundation for the development of service skills that will be highly beneficial in their future careers. By comprehending the importance of delivering

quality service and prioritizing customer satisfaction, students not only become technically skilled professionals but also individuals capable of adapting well in service-oriented work environments. Early introduction to service excellence can also help create a work culture focused on customer satisfaction, enhancing the school's positive image in the eyes of the community and the industrial world.

Previous research and community service activities have consistently shown that service excellence training has a positive impact on the skills of students or participants. Such activities can prepare students to excel in service excellence (Gusmelia et al., 2022). Service excellence training is also conducted in other studies to support students' competencies as they enter the workforce and provide excellent service to potential customers, especially in the service industry (Kurniansah & Murianto, 2018). Another study indicates that through training, students or young professionals can enhance their knowledge and skills, enabling them to understand and apply the principles of Service Excellence (Nida, 2022). This underscores the strong need for early community training through educational platforms on the importance of service excellence as a timeless life skill, especially for educational levels focused on business, industry, and the working world, such as vocational high schools.

One vocational high school that prioritizes its students' ability to provide service excellence is SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri. SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri is one of the schools under the auspices of the Pawyatan Daha Kediri Foundation, established in 1950, making it one of the oldest schools in Kediri. The school's mission is to consistently provide high-quality education that aligns with the changing times, emphasizing high competence, skills, and independence through effective efforts. Training students with applied knowledge of service excellence is one of the school's agendas to prepare students and graduates to enter the workforce effectively.

The service excellence training program at SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri is conducted through the guest teacher program, where external individuals who are not regular teachers provide lessons to students to address technological and learning facility gaps (Firdaus, 2018). This training covers aspects such as effective communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and other interpersonal skills that support the delivery of excellent service. By involving students in practical situations and relevant case studies, the school ensures that students not only understand these concepts theoretically but can also apply them in real-world contexts.

Therefore, introducing the concept of service excellence in vocational high schools is not just an investment in individual development but also a proactive step in creating an education environment responsive to the needs of the workforce. Thus, graduates can possess not only outstanding technical skills but also attitudes and values that underpin success in customer service, contributing positively to economic and social development at the local and global levels.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach and involves a method focused on the natural conditions of the object, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument. The triangulation technique, a combination of interviews, documentation, and complete participatory observation, is used to collect data (Sugiyono, 2019). Complete participatory observation is conducted with a natural impression to ensure that the researcher does not appear to be conducting research. In the context of this research, the author will collect data and fully participate in the service excellence skills training program through the Guest Teacher Program from the business, industry, and work world (DUDIKA) at Vocational High Schools (SMK).

The service excellence skills training activity organized by SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri on October 10, 2023, was attended by 107 students and 8 teachers from the Office Management program. The event took place at the Main Auditorium Building of SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri, located at Jalan Slamet Riyadi No. 66, Banjaran, Kec. Kota, Kota Kediri, East Java 64129. The author, as the researcher, acted as the main speaker and main facilitator in this activity. The theme of the event was "The Everlasting Skill of Service Excellence," emphasizing theoretical knowledge and practical skills in providing the best service.

The stages of activities conducted in this series of guest teacher training events began with an analysis of the organizer's needs, then selecting the teaching or training method (where, in this activity, the author used the Active Learning Class method), designing and preparing training materials, implementing the guest teacher training activity, and concluding with feedback, evaluation, and participant appreciation.

Result and Discussion

The importance of excellent service skills is not limited to the service sector but also becomes a crucial element in all fields of work. In this chapter, we will delve into the concept of Service Excellence and how this training can shape the character and work ethic of vocational high school (SMK) students. Through a profound understanding of the principles of excellent service, it is expected that students can develop a proactive attitude, empathy, and effective communication skills. Thus, students are not only ready to face challenges in the workforce but can also become positive agents of change in advancing the image of SMK as an institution producing high-quality graduates.

This activity comprises a series of stages that combine observation and training with the following steps:

1. Needs Analysis of the School

In this stage, the author and the team conducted pre-activity preparations by consulting with the school and exploring the desired objectives of the school with this training. It was found that the school wanted to develop students' skills in practicing service excellence as part of the preparation for Field Work Practices Program that would be conducted soon after the training. The school hoped that this

training could assist students in providing the best service, not only to customers in the companies where they intern but also in shaping a positive and supportive environment among fellow colleagues.

2. Choosing the Teaching or Training Method

This service excellence training applies the Active Learning Class teaching method, an approach that allows active student involvement in the learning process, both through interactions among students and interactions between students and the instructor during the learning process (Cahyo, 2013). The author chose this method as the best approach for service excellence training because of its focus on active participant involvement in both theoretical and practical learning. The author's efforts are also directed at ensuring that all students can actively participate in all training activities, so that the goals of the training can be optimally achieved.

3. Designing and Compiling Training Materials

The author adjusted the content of the material to meet the needs of the organizing school. After further identification, the school expected its students to develop a mindset and actions that reflected service excellence. This aimed to ensure that when they engaged in the working world, both during PKL internships and in their daily work, they could provide the best service without rigidity. After gathering information about the basic abilities of the students and the school's needs, the author designed training materials that included a combination of theory and practice. The material involved various aspects, including the introduction of service excellence, role-playing with case studies of services, leaderless group discussions (LGD), and the presentation of several case analyses to be answered individually by students. This approach was taken to evaluate students' understanding of the material and practices taught during this training.

4. Implementation of Guest Teacher Training Activity



Figure 1. The Delivery of Material by the Author as the Speaker

The agenda for service excellence training through the Guest Teacher Program at Vocational High School (SMK) started with an MC guiding the event, represented by

one of the office management students from SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri. The MC guided the proceedings from the opening, welcoming, to the prayer to commence the activity. Following that, the introduction of the trainers was carried out by the moderator, and the core training activities kicked off with an ice-breaking session or an activity conducted with the aim of lightening the atmosphere. After all participants were enthusiastic and ready, the activities commenced with the following sequence:

a. Introduction to Service Excellence Concept

The first topic presented in this activity delved deeply into the concept of service excellence. The content included discussions on the definition of service excellence, the importance of service excellence, emphasizing that if human resources in an organization or company did not implement this best service, customers would gradually disappear due to the principle of "no service, no business." It was emphasized that the understanding should be instilled that customers did not only consider our company as a last resort, so without good service, they would switch to competitors. Next was the in-depth exploration of the 6A service excellence concept, consisting of ability, attitude, appearance, attention, action, and accountability (Barata, 2004). Specifically for the appearance aspect, the author further explained how to present oneself appropriately in the workplace, covering body appearance, face, hair or hijab, hands and fingers, breath and odor, as well as clothing.

The theoretical exploration continued with the presentation of customer types and how to handle customers with various personalities, then adapting the most suitable solutions to effectively deliver service excellence. There was also a discussion of challenging customer cases and how to overcome them, as service personnel would always encounter difficult cases or demanding customers. The theoretical content concluded with providing quick tips for handling customers effectively in general, applicable in both normal service conditions and situations requiring special attention.

b. Role Play with Service Case Studies

One way to develop service excellence skills was through role-play activities. Role-play was a simulation activity conducted by students to practice service excellence skills. Role play had proven to be a fun, safe, and effective strategy to enhance learning understanding (Woodhouse, 2019). This activity was carried out with predetermined scenarios. Students took on the roles of employees or service personnel providing service to customers. Prior to this, students formed small groups consisting of 2 members each and started playing their roles for 5 minutes. After completing one role, they switched roles with the same case for another 5 minutes.

The cases provided at this stage are as follows:

Table 1. Case List for The Role Play

No	Location	Cases
1	Handphone store	Customers insist on buying a high specification cellphone but with a minimal budget
2	Computer store	Customer wants to buy a computer with their favorite brand but that brand is not available in the store (give a recommendation)
3	Department Store	Customer is angry when they buy shoes which when they check at home turn out to be a different size from their pair
4	Bank	ATM card is swallowed in ATM machines even though customer is in a hurry and the queue at the bank is very large
5	Skincare Clinic	Customer who is hesitant is very confused about choosing because he/she has studied all the products
6	Watch Gallery	Customers is very careful in choosing watches and has previously had bad experiences where he/she only bought a watch a few days ago but it immediately broke, so there are lots of questions for the seller.

c. Leaderless Group Discussion with Service Case

This stage involved a simulation method where several students formed groups based on a specific problem, did not appoint a leader beforehand, and let the students discuss the issue (Zhao et al., 2019). This activity aimed to develop students' teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills. In LGD, students were grouped into several teams, and they were given a task or problem to discuss.

The problem to be solved is presented as follows:

"A female shoe buyer purchased shoes from a shoe store to meet an important client. She wore her new shoes every day to meet the client. However, on the way, one of the shoe heels came off. The woman was very disappointed and stressed because she had to limp to the client's office. She didn't have time to fix her shoes because she was busy during the working days of that week. On Saturday, she went to the shoe store and explained what had happened to find a solution, considering that the shoes were only worn briefly before they were damaged. The store clerk asked for the purchase receipt as proof. The woman said she had lost the receipt. The clerk apologized and explained that the company policy did not allow shoe repairs without a purchase receipt. The woman was angry and argued with the clerk. She went home feeling upset and told her friends about her bad experience. If you were the shoe store, how would you respond to this case with a service excellence approach?"

This case elicited various responses from student groups and produced various solutions for both the customer and the defense of the shoe store. From the various answers presented by group representatives, the best answer was chosen from one of the groups, stating that the offered solution, besides apologizing and so on, is to help find the customer's purchase transaction report and provide a follow-up solution according to the Standard Operating Procedure but still educate that issues like this, in the future, still require the original receipt brought by the customer. In essence, as long as it does not violate meaningful procedures and still

has alternative solutions plus specific conditions from the customer (angry, and so on), the company will make an effort to use its flexibility to provide the best service for the customer. However, education is still provided, and each problem and customer's condition are considered, and coordination with superiors is needed to stay on a controlled path.

d. Individual Case Analysis on Service Cases

Before the training moved on to the closing event, the students were openly and individually given several short service cases. Armed with theoretical knowledge, understanding, and a series of practices that cultivated a growing spirit of service excellence, students were expected to respond to cases that presented challenges and required critical and creative solutions.

Some examples of cases include:

Table 2. Sample Cases for Quick Analysis

No	Cases
1	There is a potential customer who comes to your office to do questions and answers with Customer Service, one day, he wants to go to the toilet, explain how you can help him!
2	You are a marketing staff on a course. A mother is taking her child to consult about the class program at your place and starts to compare it with other cheaper places, how do you respond?
3	A customer has contacted several times via chat about wanting to exchange goods without an agreement for the reason that they are simply not suitable, what can be done to overcome this problem?
4	Colleagues are our customers. How do you maximize office performance if there are colleagues who tend to be less productive and disruptive during working hours without destroying the office atmosphere?
5	How do you face a day when you are in a position: a very bad mood (personal problem), but you get customer complaints, customers who don't buy, and your boss gives you a deadline?
6	Your customer is angry because he feels cheated by what he bought at your shop, then asks for compensation and writes negative reviews in various media. How to deal with this situation?
7	How do you ensure yourself that you apply service excellence even to bad customers who don't deserve your smile and enthusiasm?

Apart from the quick analysis case questions above, there were still several other questions which were essentially used to hone students' problem-solving skills in relation to the concept of service excellence. From this stage, quite satisfactory results were obtained where all students who answered the case above really understood what a service personnel who adheres to the principles of service excellence should think and do.

5. Closing of Main Activities

The main activity concluded with a Q&A session and feedback from participants regarding the training. As the speaker and facilitator, the author provided evaluations of the activities. The author also informed all participants that they are available for

consultation outside training hours, either through instant messaging or social media. Before the event was closed by the moderator and host, awards were presented to the outstanding participants in this service excellence training event. Small prizes were also given as a token of appreciation and recognition for the active participation of students in the activities.

Based on the observations, the author's activities, and testimonials from the school after the training, represented by one of the office management teachers, it was found that the training participants, 11th-grade Office Management students at SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri, were very enthusiastic and showed positive changes during the training. It was explained that usually, there are students who tend to be less active in class, but specifically in this training, students were very active and enthusiastic in participating in each stage of the activities. From the observations, students appeared to be very engaged in the Q&A sessions, role-plays, group discussions, and quick analyses. Not only one or a few individuals but almost all of the hundreds of students participated and demonstrated a good understanding of both theory and practice.

From the evaluation results, the guest speaker program was considered successful in achieving its goals. Students showed an improvement in understanding and skills in providing excellent service. They also gained more confidence in serving customers. Moreover, the teachers who participated in this event were very supportive and contributed to the liveliness of the program, making students more enthusiastic about the training. This indicates that good synergy between students and teachers is the key to the success of learning (Pinner, 2019), especially in participating in guest speaker training programs, which are very capable of driving the success of this service excellence training program.



Figure 1. The Documentation after the Training

Discussion

The service excellence training activity through the Guest Speaker program at SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri is a collaborative effort of support from both the school and DUDIKA to prepare vocational school students to better understand the real-world competencies, especially in the context of services representing a company's quality and concern in the eyes of the community. Service excellence is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor for business success (Asif, 2015). This can only be achieved through the empowerment of human resources ready to provide their best services (Lashley, 2012).

The series of training on Service Excellence is essential to enhance skills in handling customers, especially with the right intensity (Martyn & Anderson, 2018; Dharamdass & Fernando, 2018). Despite its limitations in duration, which was relatively short, around 3-4 hours, this activity instills the hope that each student has gained a deep understanding and the necessary skills to achieve success in the professional realm. With the implementation of the presented concepts of service excellence, vocational school students will be able to provide optimal services. This training also enhances their ability to demonstrate and implement positive service excellence practices in the real world (Cavanaugh et al., 2021). This is not only in the context of internships or early employment but also in every aspect of their lives.

Service excellence is not just an additional skill but an essential foundation that involves a deep understanding of customer needs influencing satisfaction (Handoko, 2021), work ethics, and effective communication skills. Students who undergo this training can develop a proactive attitude, empathy, and responsibility towards their tasks. Moreover, a deep understanding of service excellence concepts also helps students overcome challenges and complex situations in the professional world. This not only optimizes their ability to provide excellent service but also shapes a character that can positively contribute to the company or organization where they work. Thus, service excellence training is not just an investment in skill development but also an essential foundation for building a successful and sustainable career.

Conclusion

Based on the summarized observations and activities conducted by the author, as well as testimonials from the school after the training, it can be concluded that the training participants from the 11th-grade Office Management program at SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri showed high enthusiasm and positive changes during the training. Students who are usually less active in class appeared very enthusiastic and active in every stage of the activity. Observations indicate maximum participation from almost all students, both in Q&A sessions, role-playing, group discussions, and quick analyses.

The evaluation results show that the Guest Speaker program successfully achieved its goals. Students experienced an improvement in understanding and skills in providing excellent service. They also gained more confidence in interacting with customers during practical sessions. The strong support from the teachers added vibrancy to the training

event, creating a positive synergy between students and teachers. In this context, the collaboration between the school and DUDIKA in bringing the Guest Speaker program proves its success in preparing vocational school students for the workforce, especially in terms of essential service skills reflecting the quality and concern of the company.

The training on service excellence at SMK Pawyatan Daha 1 Kediri emphasizes that customer handling skills are crucial, especially with the appropriate intensity. Despite being conducted in a short period, this training successfully instilled a deep understanding and essential skills for the students. The concepts of service excellence are not just additional skills but important foundations shaping students' characters to make positive contributions in the professional world. Thus, this training not only impacts early job aspects but also creates a strong foundation for the long-term career success of students.

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