

Strengthening the Professionalism of Hospitality Educators through Grooming and Gesture Training

Author

Husnita

Correspondence

Telkom University

husnita@telkomuniversity.ac.id,

Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the strengthening of *professional presence* among hospitality educators through grooming and gesture training as a strategy to develop service culture and enhance the image and competitiveness of vocational education institutions. The main problem addressed in this study is the limited understanding of educators regarding the role of grooming, gesture, and consistency of professional behavior as part of *living example* practices that directly influence the development of students' service character in classrooms, institutional environments, and digital platforms. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach based on community service activities. The program was conducted at SMK Pariwisata Telkom, Jalan Palasari No. 1, Bandung, involving 30 participants consisting of the principal, teachers, and administrative staff. Data were collected through participatory observation, focused group discussions, and written reflections from participants. The data were analyzed using an informative descriptive analysis by categorizing the findings into themes of professional presence, nonverbal communication, and consistency of professional behavior. The results indicate an increase in participants' understanding and awareness of their role as *role models* or *living examples* in hospitality education. Participants recognized that grooming, gesture, and professional communication significantly influence the learning atmosphere, students' trust, and stakeholders' perceptions of the institution. The discussion links the empirical findings with social dramaturgy theory, nonverbal communication theory, and social learning theory, emphasizing the importance of exemplarity in vocational education. The study concludes that grooming and gesture training is an effective strategy for strengthening the *professional presence* of hospitality educators and contributes to the development of service culture and the sustainable enhancement of institutional image.

Keywords: Grooming; Gesture; Hospitality; Professional presence; Living example; Institutional image

Received: 09 January 2026. Accepted 03 July 2026

Introduction

The hospitality industry is inherently built on human interaction, where service quality is shaped not only by technical competence but also by professional identity, behavioral consistency, and communicative presence. In contemporary global and digital contexts, hospitality professionals are increasingly expected to demonstrate not only operational skills, but also professional demeanor, emotional intelligence, and representational conduct that reflects institutional values. Consequently, vocational hospitality education is expected to prepare students to meet these complex professional demands by cultivating both technical and behavioral competencies from an early stage.

In principle, hospitality educators should function as professional role models who consistently demonstrate the attitudes, appearance, communication style, and service orientation expected in

the industry. Through daily interaction, educators transmit professional norms implicitly through what they wear, how they speak, how they move, and how they interact. This implicit learning process is critical in vocational settings, where students learn not only from instruction but also from observation and imitation. In this ideal condition, the classroom becomes a microcosm of professional hospitality culture.

However, in practice, this ideal is rarely fully realized. Professionalism in vocational education is often reduced to subject mastery, administrative compliance, and classroom discipline, while grooming, gesture, communication style, and digital conduct are treated as personal matters rather than pedagogical responsibilities. As a result, many hospitality educators may teach service excellence while simultaneously displaying behaviors that do not reflect hospitality values. This contradiction creates a hidden curriculum in which students receive mixed messages about what professionalism actually means.

This gap becomes more problematic in the digital era. Educators now interact with students through online meetings, messaging platforms, and social media, where professional boundaries, tone, visual appearance, and nonverbal cues continue to shape perceptions. Yet these digital spaces are often not governed by the same professional standards applied in face-to-face interactions, leading to inconsistencies in how educators present themselves as hospitality professionals.

Empirical evidence further reinforces this gap. Labor market data show that hospitality employees increasingly demand soft skills, professionalism, and service attitude, yet customer complaints in hospitality sectors continue to center on staff behavior, communication, and attitude rather than technical errors. This indicates a misalignment between workforce preparation and industry expectations—an alignment that vocational education is expected to bridge but has not yet fully achieved.

Previous community-service-based studies have shown that training programs can improve educators' awareness of professionalism, but they also reveal that behavioral consistency remains weak and that changes are often cognitive rather than performative. This suggests that conventional professional development approaches have not sufficiently addressed the embodied and performative dimensions of professionalism.

Therefore, a critical gap exists between how hospitality educators are expected to embody professional presence and how professionalism is actually practiced in everyday educational contexts. This gap justifies the need for targeted interventions that focus not only on what educators know, but on how they appear, behave, and communicate as living representations of hospitality culture. It is within this gap that the present study situates its investigation into grooming and gesture training as a strategy for strengthening professional presence in vocational hospitality education.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a community-service-based design grounded in literature review and participatory practice. This approach was selected to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how professional presence among hospitality educators can be strengthened through grooming and gesture within the context of vocational education.

Literature Review

The literature review was conducted systematically by examining relevant scholarly sources, including academic books, national and international journal articles, and institutional reports addressing professional presence, nonverbal communication, role modeling in education, and

hospitality culture. The main theoretical foundations included social dramaturgy theory (Goffman), kinesics theory (Birdwhistell), nonverbal communication theory (Mehrabian), and studies in hospitality and vocational education (Lashley; Bandura; OECD). This review was used to construct the conceptual framework and to identify gaps between theory and practice.

Research Procedure

The study was implemented through a series of training and mentoring activities at SMK Pariwisata Telkom, Palasari street No. 1, Bandung, involving 30 participants consisting of the school principal, teachers, and administrative staff. The research procedures included: (1) initial problem mapping through preliminary discussions, (2) delivery of literature-based instructional materials, (3) practical simulations of grooming, gesture, and professional behavior consistency, (4) focus group discussions, and (5) participant reflection and feedback. These stages were designed to integrate theoretical knowledge with direct experiential learning.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through participatory observation, participants' reflective notes, and activity documentation. An informative descriptive analysis was applied by categorizing field findings into key themes: professional grooming, gesture and body language, consistency of professional behavior, and institutional representation. The findings were then compared with previous studies to identify similarities, reinforcement, and contextual differences.

Comparison with Previous Studies

In contrast to previous studies that primarily emphasize theoretical perspectives or industry contexts, this study adopts a more applied and context-specific approach within vocational education. While earlier research focused largely on conceptualizing professional behavior, this study adds a dimension of direct practice and reflective learning, positioning educators as living examples, thereby providing empirical evidence for the application of theory in the context of hospitality vocational school.

Results and Discussions

Result

The results of the community service program conducted at SMK Pariwisata Telkom Bandung indicate a significant change in participants' understanding and awareness of the concept of professional presence in hospitality education. Based on participatory observation, focus group discussions, and written reflections from 30 informants consisting of the principal, teachers, and administrative staff, it was found that before the program, educator professionalism was generally perceived in a narrow sense, primarily as mastery of instructional content and administrative discipline.

Following the grooming and gesture training, participants demonstrated an increased understanding of their role as role models or living examples in shaping students' service attitudes and character. Participants identified that grooming, gesture, and nonverbal communication play a critical role in creating a conducive learning environment and in visibly representing hospitality values. Participant reflections further revealed an emerging awareness that educators' professional behavior is continuously observed and directly imitated by students, both in practical learning settings and in daily interactions.

Another salient finding was the emergence of critical awareness regarding inconsistencies in professional behavior in digital environments. Participants acknowledged that communication practices on online platforms, such as instant messaging groups and virtual meetings, often fail to reflect the same standards of ethics and hospitality applied in face-to-face interactions. This

finding highlights the need to strengthen digital professional ethics as an integral component of hospitality education in the digital era.

Discussions

The findings of this study reinforce the theoretical framework applied in the analysis, particularly Goffman's social dramaturgy theory, which conceptualizes individuals as social actors who perform professional roles through their appearance and behavior in public settings. Within this framework, hospitality educators function as key actors who consciously and unconsciously shape perceptions of professionalism through the grooming and gestures they display in front of students.

The results are also consistent with Birdwhistell's kinesics theory and Mehrabian's nonverbal communication model, which emphasize that gestures and body language are symbolic communication elements that significantly influence the perceptions and emotions of message recipients. In the context of hospitality education, the empirical findings demonstrate that educators' gestures contribute to students' sense of safety, comfort, and trust, which are fundamental to the development of service culture.

Furthermore, these findings support Lashley's perspective that hospitality is not merely a technical competence, but a socially constructed culture formed through relationships, empathy, and service-oriented behavior. The collective consistency of educators' professional conduct contributes to strengthening institutional image and enhancing stakeholder trust, including that of industry and the wider community. This finding is also aligned with Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that learning occurs through observation and imitation of significant others—in this case, educators as representations of professional values.

Therefore, this community service initiative not only serves as a practical intervention but also provides empirical contributions to the development of *professional presence* in hospitality vocational education. The integration of theoretical frameworks and reflective practice in this study extends previous research that has primarily focused on industrial or general educational contexts and further underscores the critical role of educators in fostering a sustainable hospitality culture.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion presented, it can be concluded that the community service program in the form of grooming and gesture training for educators at SMK Pariwisata Telkom Bandung empirically supports the research objectives and hypothesis. The strengthening of professional presence through grooming, gesture, and consistent professional behavior was shown to increase educators' awareness of their role as living examples in shaping hospitality culture within vocational education.

The findings indicate a shift in educators' understanding of professionalism from a narrow focus on cognitive and administrative aspects toward a more holistic perspective that includes nonverbal communication, professional ethics, and behavioral consistency across classrooms, institutional settings, and digital platforms. The alignment between the research objectives and the observed outcomes confirms that a training approach grounded in both theoretical frameworks and reflective practice is effective in integrating the concept of professional presence into the context of hospitality education.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study highlight the need to integrate the strengthening of professional presence into the continuous professional development of hospitality educators. Schools may utilize these findings as a basis for developing internal guidelines related to grooming, gesture, and digital professional ethics. Furthermore, the living example approach can be implemented as a character-based learning strategy to reinforce service values, thereby supporting the enhancement of institutional image and competitiveness in the eyes of industry and the wider community.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies are recommended to examine the long-term impact of educators' professional presence on students' behavior and employability in the hospitality industry. In addition, quantitative or mixed-methods approaches could be employed to measure the relationship between educators' consistency in professional behavior and stakeholder perceptions, including those of industry partners and parents. Comparative studies across schools or vocational specializations are also suggested to expand the generalizability of the findings.

References

- Bandura, A. (2020). Toward the psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, **15**(1), 89–119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619895568>
- Burgoon, J. K., Guerrero, L. K., & Floyd, K. (2021). *Nonverbal communication* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Goleman, D. (2020). Leadership that gets results. *Harvard Business Review*, **98**(2), 78–90.
- Lashley, C. (2020). Hospitality and hospitableness. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, **91**, 102651. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102651>
- Molinsky, A. (2022). Global dexterity revisited: Adapting behavior across cultures. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, **36**(3), 447–460. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2021.0123>
- OECD. (2019). *OECD future of education and skills 2030*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Prasetyo, A., & Lestari, D. (2023). Peran dosen dalam pengembangan profesionalisme guru melalui kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat. *KONTRIBUSIA: Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat*, **6**(1), 45–53. <https://doi.org/10.26740/kontribusi.v6n1.p45-53>
- Rahmawati, N., & Hidayat, R. (2021). Penguatan kompetensi profesional pendidik melalui program pengabdian kepada masyarakat berbasis pelatihan soft skills. *KONTRIBUSIA: Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat*, **4**(2), 215–223. <https://doi.org/10.26740/kontribusi.v4n2.p215-223>
- Trilling, B., & Fadel, C. (2021). *21st century skills: Learning for life in our times*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Walker, J. R. (2020). *Introduction to hospitality management* (8th ed.). Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.