

Lobbying and Negotiation Techniques to Enhance Business Communication Skills through Virtual Reality Training: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract Lobbying and negotiation skills are some of the required skills to succeed in business and social life. Conventional universities may develop their students' skills through real-life scenarios while this could be challenging for open and distance universities which students are scattered around the world. Virtual Reality is an alternative technology that allows students to experience real-life scenarios in a simulated environment. This research aims to develop website-based Virtual Reality training to enhance learning in the business communication subject, with a specific focus on lobbying and negotiation techniques in distance education. This research adopts the Borg & Gall Research & Development (R&D) Method for educational research. This paper focuses on the preliminary stage which gathered the data required to construct a high-quality mood board and flowchart aligned with stakeholder needs to produce high-quality virtual reality training to enhance negotiation skills. Primary data is gathered through Focus Group Discussions involving students, tutors, and business communication practitioners. Additionally, secondary data is derived from extensive literature and document reviews, including relevant studies and documents. The result shows that informants are passionate about the idea of using virtual reality to enhance negotiation skills. Options of background, gender, and situation settings as well as interchangeable roleplay are preferred in boosting the motivation and enhancing the practical knowledge of negotiation skills.

Keywords distance education, lobbying, negotiation, virtual reality

INTRODUCTION

The demand for effective business communication has escalated due to various factors. These encompass the evolving dynamics within organizations as they expand and grow, heightened competition among companies, elevated public expectations for comprehensive information, a more discerning populace, swift technological advancements, and the amplified impact of public opinion and image on organizational entities (Priyatna, 2009). In the realm of business communication, negotiation is intrinsically intertwined. Negotiation and advocacy serve as the forefront of achieving the aims and targets of any endeavor. Effectively coordinating and aligning diverse interests (such as stakeholders) is crucial in ensuring that agreements align with the established strategy, particularly with external parties.

Lobbying and negotiation stand out as the most efficient methods for addressing and reconciling conflicts or divergent interests that arise in human interactions, with communication forming the foundation. Lobbying involves individuals striving to sway others for a particular objective, whether it's within a government body or a specific organization. This activity can be categorized into three types: conventional lobbying, grassroots lobbying, and political action committee lobbying (Sumartias, 2016). Lobbying constitutes the initial phase in the progression toward formal negotiations.

Negotiation is a critical skill needed for effective management (Lewicki, 2020). Formal negotiations typically adhere to established and organized procedures and mechanisms. In contrast, informal negotiations occur in a setting outside the structured formal environment, characterized by the absence of standardized procedural rules, yet still pursuing the same goals and objectives. According to (Iriantara, Yosol et al., 2008), negotiation serves a dual purpose: it is about not only achieving our desired outcomes but also doing so in the most efficient and optimal manner.

The practice of negotiation skills is required for business professionals as well as students who are required to improve business communication skills to help them be ready for the workplace. This may be done through real-life scenario simulation learning in conventional universities. However, this is not

an easy task to conduct in distance education. Distance education allow the students to learn independently and does not to gather in one place to learn together (Belawati, 2000).

One of the learning facilities provided by Universitas Terbuka as a distance and open university is course material books. In the business communication subject, students are required to attain competencies in lobbying and negotiation. Learning about these practices presents unique challenges, particularly for UT students engaged in distance learning. The Course Material Books (BMP) currently available are text-heavy with limited visual aids. While the inclusion of images in the material aims to facilitate the understanding of the negotiation process, it cannot replicate the experience of hands-on practice. This, however, poses a constraint for students in open and distance education who are self-directed in their studies and lack direct communication or practical interaction with peers. They must rely on their imagination to a greater extent when it comes to understanding lobbying and negotiation practices or resort to watching instructional videos on platforms like YouTube. Given that students have varying levels of imagination, experience, and cognitive abilities, this approach may not be equally effective for everyone.

Virtual Reality can be an alternative media to solve those problems. Virtual reality is chosen to promote lobbying and negotiation skills since the learning outcome of the module on “lobbying and negotiation technique” is to “apply” the negotiation skill, which is “C3” in Taxonomy Bloom (Huitt, 2011). VR can create an immersive learning environment that simulates real-life scenarios (Holuša et al., 2023). This enables students to practice negotiation skills in a controlled, yet realistic setting, enhancing their ability to apply these skills effectively in actual business situations (Juliana et al., 2022). Besides, negotiation skills are best acquired through experience. VR allows students to actively participate in negotiations, make decisions, and observe the consequences of their actions (McGovern et al., 2020a). This hands-on experience facilitates a deeper understanding of the nuances involved in negotiation. Furthermore, in a distance education setting, students are scattered across different locations (Fadilla et al., 2023). VR bridges this gap by creating a shared virtual space where students and instructors can interact, collaborate,

and engage in negotiation exercises as if they were physically present in the same room (Young et al., 2020).

Based on the background, this research aims to develop website-based Virtual Reality training to enhance learning in the business communication subject, with a specific focus on lobbying and negotiation techniques in distance education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

VR and related technologies are making a revolution in education in terms of learning and acquiring skills (Juliana et al., 2022). The use of visual (images), audio, and video (multimedia) learning materials, as well as the utilization of Virtual Reality in education, is growing rapidly. This is because the use of these learning materials can enhance students' learning motivation (Kavanagh et al., 2017). Virtual Reality enables users to interact with their surroundings as if experiencing real-world interactions (Nurbadi, 2018)

Recent studies indicate that individuals have the capacity to retain a greater amount of information and effectively apply learned skills and acquired knowledge following their engagement with virtual reality simulations. This underscores the pivotal role of computer-generated reality as a vital tool for learning (Krokos et al., 2019). Furthermore, VR-based instruction is an effective means of enhancing learning outcomes (Merchant et al., 2014)

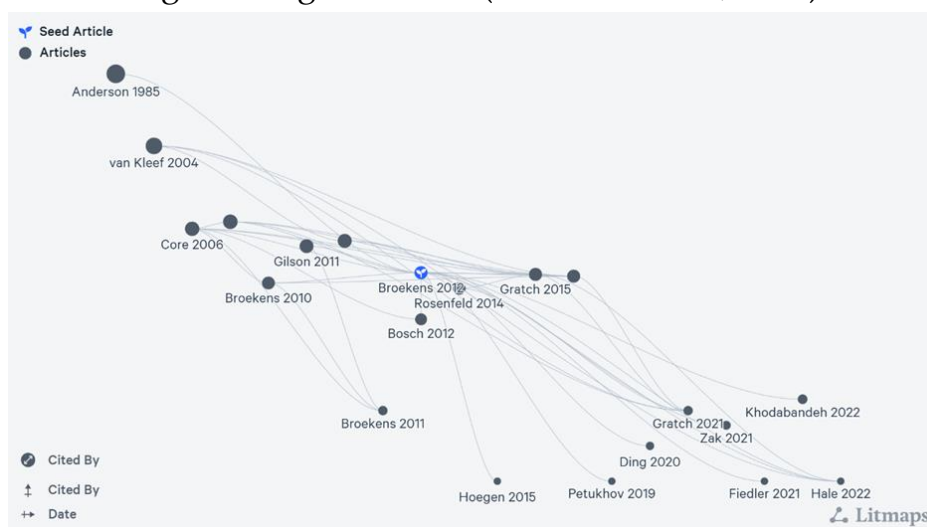


Figure 1. LitMaps of Research on VR in Lobbying and Negotiation Skills

Figure 1 shows the interconnection between articles related to Virtual Reality in negotiation skills. It shows 20 articles related to the seed article, written by Broekens in 2012 entitled “Virtual reality negotiation training increases negotiation knowledge and skill”. (Broekens et al., 2012) investigated learning effects on subjects' negotiation skills and knowledge and found significant effects of training on conversation skills and negotiation knowledge. Besides, the map also shows the earlier works related to Broekens’s paper written by Core in 2006 entitled “Teaching Negotiation Skills through Practice and Reflection with Virtual Humans”(Core et al., 2006). The interaction of this article shows that the development of virtual humans in training negotiation skills has been discussed since 2006 yet not many articles write about that after that. This is in accordance with findings from (Juliana et al., 2022; McGovern et al., 2020b) who stated that research regarding the implementation of VR in education is still limited.

METHOD

This study employs the Research and Development (R & D) method of Borg & Gall (1983) whereby the research is intended to develop and authenticate educational products (Borg & Gall, 1983). Figure 1 shows the steps of the research:

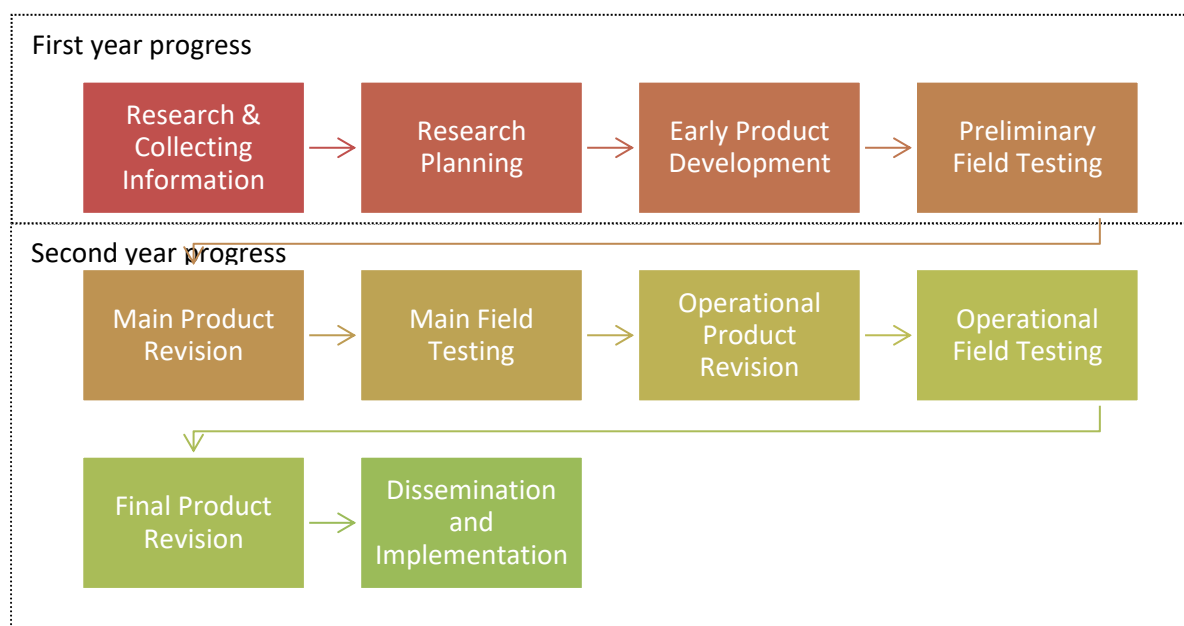


Figure 2. Research Steps (adopted from Borg & Gall,1983)

The process started with gathering information on lobbying and negotiation skills, which served as the central focus for product development. Afterward, the team conducts the research planning based on the information gathering. During this phase, the team created study material and constructed the scenario, as well as selected vendors of VR technology which were able to realize the study plan and suited the budget allocation.

After selecting the vendors, the team and vendor conducted several meetings to finalize the flow chart and mood board, accustomed to the learning outcomes and proposed scenarios. The subsequent step involved initial field testing and expert evaluations, which were conducted through focus group discussions involving students, tutors, lecturers, and practitioners of business communication.

A. Focus Group Discussion

Preliminary Field Testing is conducted through Focus Group Discussion (FGD). It involves tutors, lecturers, students, and practitioners of business communication. The gathered data is subsequently employed to enhance the prototype until the finalized application (VR Training) is prepared for testing.

In the current state of this article, the author focuses on the early phases of the first year. In the early phases of this initial study, a qualitative method is employed, with a primary emphasis on gathering data to create a well-crafted visual representation that meets the requirements of stakeholders. Primary data is acquired through Focus Group Discussions, which include participation from students, educators, and professionals in business communication. FGD is conducted online via Zoom Meeting in November 2021. Furthermore, secondary data is obtained through a thorough examination of relevant literature and documents, encompassing pertinent research findings and records.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The website-based VR in Negotiation skills will encompass tasks involved in the business transaction process, spanning from initial preparation, needs

assessment, and negotiation, to finalizing a report. Through VR, students can immerse themselves in a dynamic experience, exposing them to various scenarios and alternatives.

Lobbying and negotiation skills in business communication can be effectively taught and practiced using Virtual Reality (VR) as it creates Realistic Simulation and initiates experiential learning. VR technology allows for the creation of highly realistic and immersive environments. This means that students can engage in virtual lobbying and negotiation scenarios that closely mimic real-world situations. They can interact with virtual stakeholders, face challenges, and make decisions in a controlled but authentic setting. Besides, both lobbying and negotiation are skills that benefit immensely from experiential learning. VR provides a platform where students can actively participate in these processes, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical context. This hands-on experience leads to a deeper understanding and retention of the concepts. Furthermore, the immersive nature of VR makes learning more engaging and enjoyable for students. This heightened level of engagement often leads to higher motivation levels, which can have a positive impact on learning outcomes (Broekens et al., 2012). In addition, VR technology can replicate a wide range of lobbying and negotiation scenarios across different industries, cultures, and contexts. This exposes students to various challenges and dynamics, preparing them to adapt their skills to a multitude of real-world situations (Zhao, 2023).

Additionally, considering the nature of distance education in Indonesia which is diverse in terms of infrastructure and student conditions that are scattered geographically, this virtual reality training will be based on the website. Website-based VR training enables students to experience the training without needing to have a VR glass or require extra megabytes to load the page and can be utilized on a mobile phone, laptop, or PC.

A. Flow Chart of the website based-Virtual Reality

Figure 2 shows the flow chart of the developed virtual reality application concept. It shows the flow that shows user experience in completing the VR training. It starts with user guidance, an explanation of roles, scenarios, and business communication in general. Afterward, the user enters the scenario of

setting up the meeting and then answer questions (gamification) related to business communication in general and negotiation skill in particular.

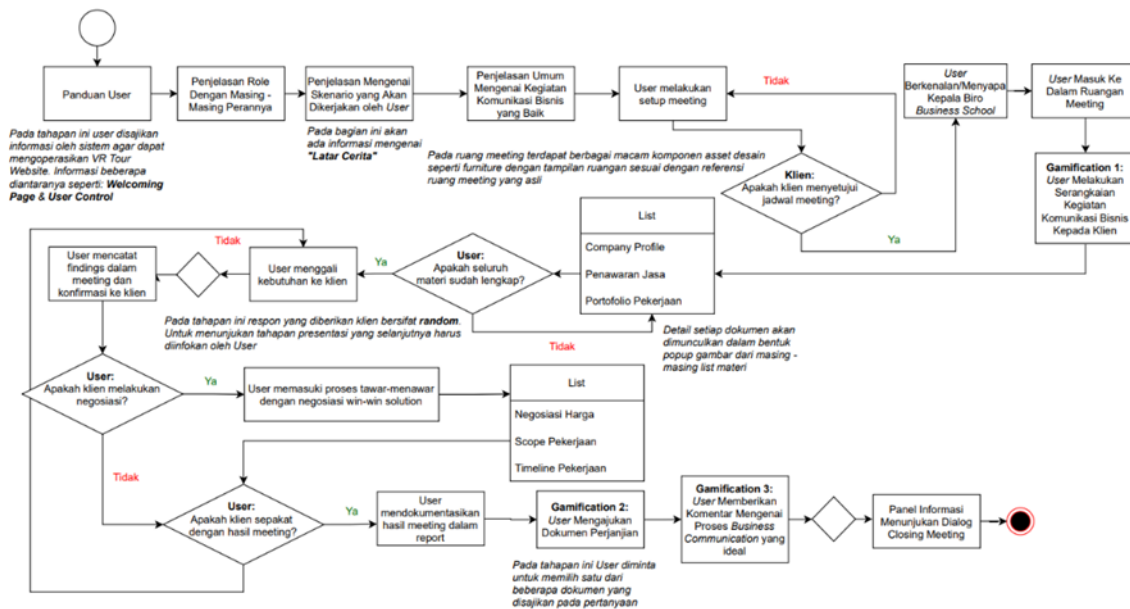


Figure 3. Flow Chart of the website based-Virtual Reality

B. Creating Virtual Reality Applications as a Substitute for Online Practical Learning Tools

The virtual reality applications for business communication in negotiations are designed in response to the specific requirements of students, lecturers, tutors, and practitioners of business communication. The progression of developing these virtual reality applications, as outlined in the narrative guide, can be elucidated as follows:

a) Welcoming page

In the first scene of the VR training, the welcoming page will be shown, and then followed by the user guidance of the VR training.

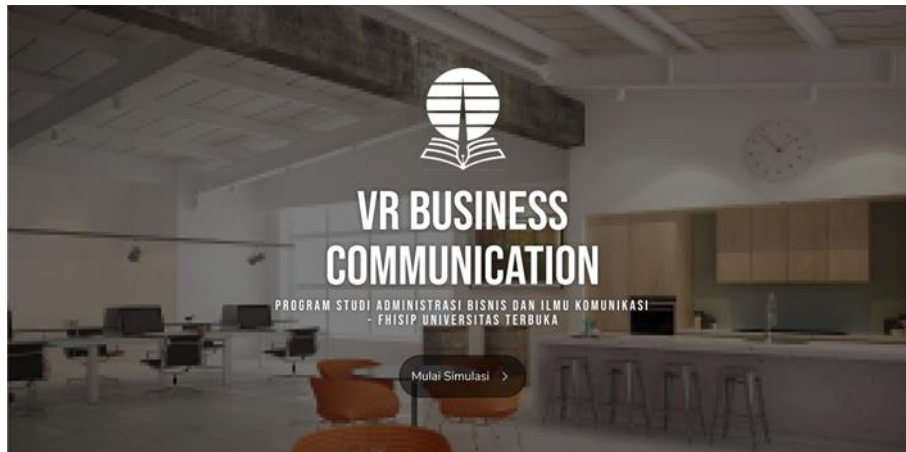


Figure 4. Welcoming Page

b) Role Explanation

The user will be presented with an overview of the roles involved in the VR training, accompanied by detailed descriptions of the attire associated with each role. The characters of the VR training are the marketing communication officer and the head of the institution/department (client). Users will have the opportunity to explore comprehensive information about each role, complete with 3D animations showcasing the corresponding attire. 3D Roles have advantages over 2D, supported by findings from Imaginus VR show that 3D provides students with a remarkable chance to explore visual materials in three dimensions. According to feedback from educators and teachers, 3D has proven to be 40% more effective and captivating compared to conventional 2D images, also, it encourages students to delve deeper into their studies and yielded truly remarkable results (ImaginusVR, 2021).

c) Gamification

The user will encounter a detailed explanation or case study as well as questions about the concept of negotiation skills and practical questions related to the scenario of VR training (Figure 5).

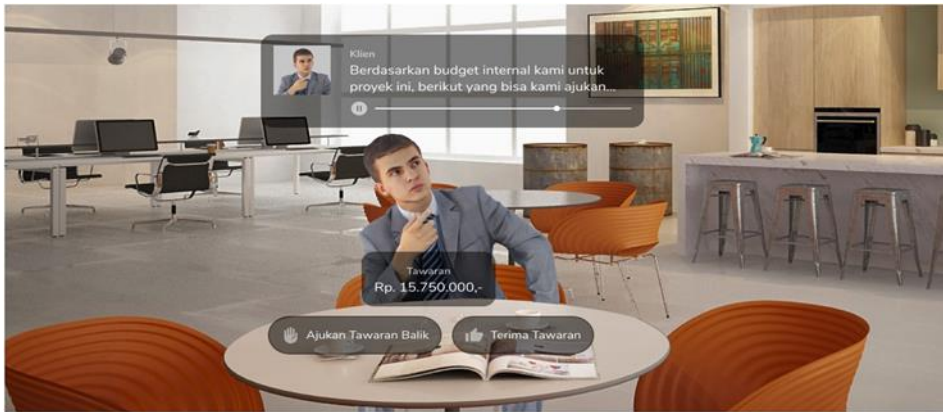


Figure 5. Gamification

In the gamification phase, users will be tasked with responding to inquiries regarding client communication. This encompasses activities like arranging meetings, presenting company information such as profiles, services, and portfolios, probing client needs through requirement gathering, documenting meeting outcomes, and confirming details with the client. The incorporation of gamification elements draws from course materials and literature in business communication, specifically focusing on negotiation skills. Gamification in learning offers a range of benefits, from constructivist pedagogies to motivating and engaging students as well as providing a safe and playful space (Whitton, 2013).

d) Closing

This phase marks the ultimate step for users to engage in a VR Business Communication scenario. They will have the choice to conclude the scenario or initiate it anew. Also, they will be asked for feedback on VR training at the end of the session.

C. The first version of Mood board

A more comprehensive delineation of the story guidelines can be found in the mood board, outlined as follows:

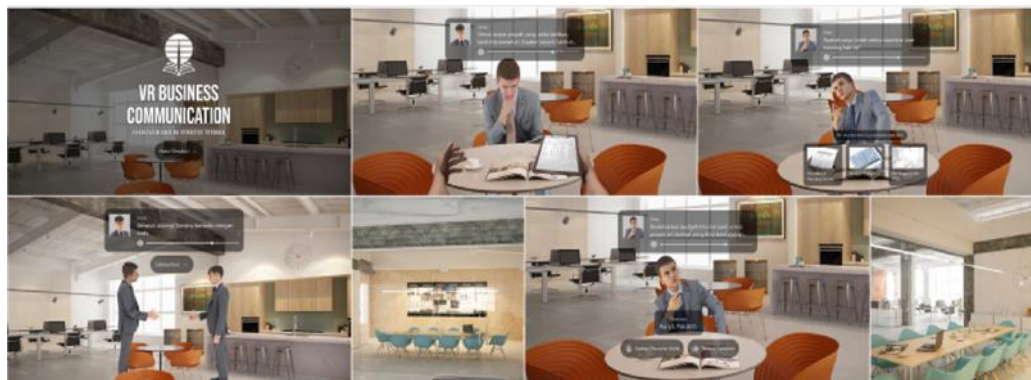


Figure 6. Mood Board of Business Negotiation Simulation - Preliminary Stage

D. Revision of Mood Board based on FGD feedback.

The initial stages of virtual reality application development saw alterations influenced by feedback from students, lecturers, tutors, and business practitioners of Business Communication. Through the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) activity, input was gathered, leading to several modifications in the design of the virtual reality business communication application development, as outlined below:

Table 1. FGD Result

Suggestion about content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable interchangeable role-play. • Enhance the intricacies of negotiation planning, particularly the mental disposition when facing various scenarios (gamification), where differing perceptions may arise in role plays. • Include an elucidation of the answer key for true or false choices. • Incorporate a case study approach within the quiz to refine students' analytical capabilities. • Offer a selection of negotiation process scenarios tailored for basic level, middle management, and top management. • Introduce varying levels of difficulty for quiz questions. The gamification levelling stage assesses students' proficiency in business communication practices. • Highlight the company's value by providing a more comprehensive explanation of the company profile. • Integrate simulation completion outcomes with assessment tasks within online tutorials.
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Visualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a selection of variety of background (small, big, moderate meeting rooms)• Gender options• Outfit options (casual, semi-formal, formal)• Provide interactive visualization
Improvement	
Suggestion	

To cater to feedback of the FGD, the mood board is altered as seen in Figure 7.

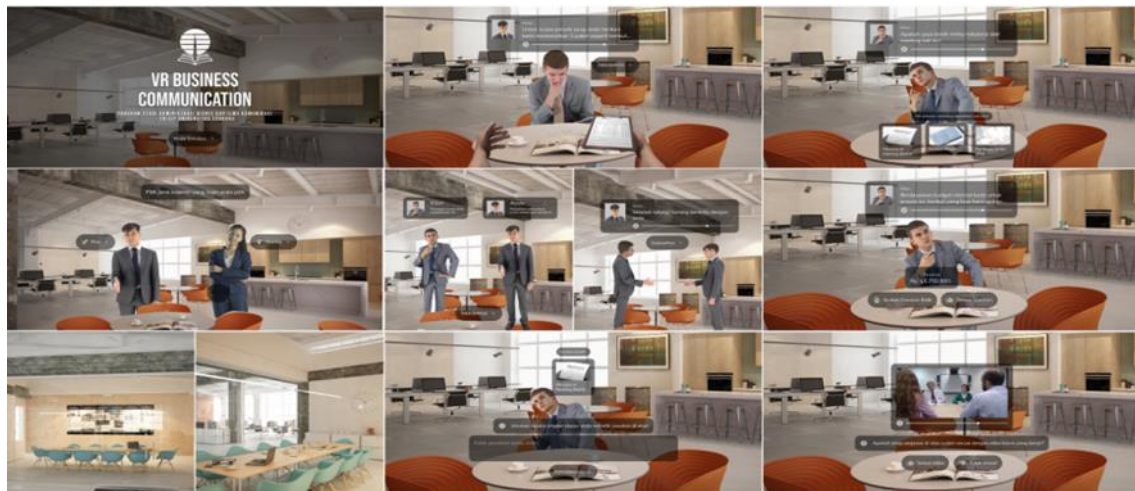


Figure 7. Mood board after Revision

Figure 7 shows the mood board has indicated gender options, as well as options of meeting rooms (small and moderate size of meeting rooms). It also offers different levels of difficulty for quiz questions. This outcome is supported by the findings of (Whitton, 2013) who stated that the games and learning research community should explore the true potential of games to acknowledge and explore the difficulties of the field, equity, and social inclusion.

CONCLUSION

The demand for enhancing the student's learning experience in improving business negotiation skills is pressing, given that students now seek more interactive resources to grasp social science skills. Utilizing VR training as an alternative medium provides students with an interactive means to acquire knowledge and skills. To accommodate varying student needs and capabilities, the design of the virtual reality business communication

application for simulating business negotiations is web-based, responsive, and interactive. This facilitates easy access to VR training without the necessity of additional tools like VR glasses. This paper primarily addresses the progress made in the first year. However, there are some limitations in this initial phase, including time constraints, budget limitations, and a need for more detailed scenarios in the VR training. Consequently, a concerted effort with the vendor team is imperative for the development team to closely monitor progress reports and ensure a seamless implementation of improvements.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest associated with the publication of this article.

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