

Speak with Confidence: A Journey to Effective Communication

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ABSTRAK

Urgensi menyelaraskan pendidikan vokasi dengan tuntutan dunia kerja nyata mengangkat sebuah program pelatihan komunikasi yang dirancang secara khusus untuk meningkatkan kepercayaan diri berbicara di depan umum pada siswa Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK) pada Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat kali ini. Masih banyak siswa yang mengalami kesulitan berkelanjutan dalam berbicara di situasi formal akibat rendahnya persepsi diri terhadap kompetensi berkomunikasi serta tingginya kecemasan berbicara. Untuk merespons permasalahan tersebut, program pelatihan komunikasi ini dilaksanakan sebagai kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat oleh Universitas Pamulang di SMKS Kusuma Bangsa yang berada di Tangerang, Banten dan diikuti oleh siswa-siswi kelas XII sebanyak 25 peserta. Program pelatihan ini mengintegrasikan strategi pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman, seperti simulasi wawancara kerja, penggunaan media motivasional - video, serta permainan komunikatif. Data yang diperoleh melalui observasi dan refleksi diri siswa menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan dalam aspek artikulasi, ketenangan saat berbicara, serta penggunaan bahasa formal. Program pelatihan ini tidak hanya berhasil menurunkan tingkat kecemasan berbicara, tetapi juga membantu menumbuhkan kesiapan sosial dan emosional siswa untuk berkomunikasi secara profesional. Sebanyak 16 dari 25 peserta (64%) melaporkan lebih percaya diri dan mengalami penurunan kecemasan saat simulasi wawancara bahasa Inggris. Namun, sebagian siswa masih perlu latihan lebih lama atau sesi lanjutan agar semakin berani tampil.

Kata Kunci: *Kepercayaan diri dalam berbicara, Komunikasi yang efektif, Pelatihan komunikasi, Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK)*

ABSTRACT

The urgency to better align vocational education with real workplace demands motivated this community service programme, which introduced a communication training initiative specifically designed to strengthen public speaking confidence among Indonesian vocational high school (SMK) students. Many students continue to experience persistent difficulty in formal speaking situations due to low self-perceived communicative competence and high speaking anxiety. To address this challenge, Universitas Pamulang implemented the programme at SMKS Kusuma Bangsa in Tangerang, Banten, involving 25 Grade XII students. The training integrated experiential learning strategies, including simulated job interviews, motivational video-based media, and communicative games. Data collected through observation and student self-reflection indicated significant improvement in articulation, composure while speaking, and the use of more formal language. The programme not only reduced speaking anxiety but also supported students' social and emotional readiness to communicate professionally. In addition, 16 of the 25 participants (64%) reported increased confidence and decreased anxiety during the English interview simulation. However, some students still require longer practice or follow-up sessions to become more willing to perform confidently in front of others.

Keywords: *Communication training, Effective communication, Self-confidence in speaking, Vocational High School (SMK)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54832/judimas.v4i1.758>

Introduction

In an era defined by rapid globalization and technological progress, communication skills have become indispensable for vocational high school students in Indonesia, who are trained to enter the workforce directly after graduation. Beyond technical expertise, the ability to communicate effectively, particularly in formal settings and English, is crucial for academic success and professional advancement. However, many vocational high school students face significant challenges in public speaking, often due to low confidence and communication anxiety. An internal observation during the 2024/2025 academic year at SMKS Kusuma Bangsa revealed that Grade XII students felt unconfident when speaking publicly, especially during simulated job interviews and class presentations. This lack of confidence stems not from inadequate knowledge but from low self-perceived communication competence and anxiety triggered by formal contexts—a finding supported by empirical research (Subekti, 2020).

In the context of Indonesian vocational education specifically, recent research confirms that vocational high school students demonstrate a significant gap between their technical competencies and their communicative abilities. Hidayani et al. (2025) profiled Indonesian vocational students' English communicative competence and found that while students possess foundational knowledge, their practical communication skills remain underdeveloped due to limited exposure to diverse communication situations, technology-related challenges, and time constraints in the curriculum. This gap directly impacts employability, as employers in Indonesia's manufacturing, hospitality, and service sectors increasingly expect vocational graduates to demonstrate professional-level communication competence alongside technical skills.

The specific partner institution for this initiative—SMKS Kusuma Bangsa in Bumi Indah, Aster IV Tahap 1, Gelam Jaya, Pasar Kemis District, Tangerang Regency, Banten—faces a concrete employability challenge. Grade XII students demonstrate anxiety during formal interactions, particularly job interviews and client-facing presentations. Teachers and school management identified the absence of structured, practical communication training as a critical barrier to student employment readiness. Unlike academic research focused on linguistic theory, this initiative directly addresses the operational need to equip graduates with demonstrable confidence and competence in workplace communication scenarios.

This initiative is explicitly positioned as community service (*Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*), which primary objective is to implement and deliver immediate practical benefit to partner students and the institution. The distinction is critical: rather than investigating communication phenomena, the program intervenes to solve an identified practical problem—the communication anxiety and limited formal speaking experience that prevent vocational graduates from successfully navigating job interviews and workplace interactions. The practical gap addressed comprises three elements: (1) students' limited exposure to formal English communication contexts; (2) absence of structured practice with constructive feedback in realistic scenarios; and (3) lack of mentoring from external practitioners who model professional communication standards. This is not a gap between competing theories but a gap between current capability and labor market expectations.

The pervasive influence of digital culture further complicates these challenges, particularly for Generation Z students, who form the majority of vocational high school students. Constant exposure to informal communication styles on platforms like TikTok and Instagram creates a disconnection between students' daily language habits and the formal communication standards expected in professional environments (Sikandar, 2025). This gap often manifests as hesitation, poor articulation, and diminished confidence during critical situations such as job interviews or formal presentations, ultimately affecting students' employability. Employers frequently report that vocational high school graduates fail at the interview stage due to inadequate communication skills, including unclear articulation and lack of fluency, underscoring the urgent need to address this issue.

Scholarly research emphasizes that effective communication extends beyond linguistic mastery to include psychological and social dimensions. Taman et al. (2023) highlight that public speaking practice enhances both cognitive and affective aspects, enabling students to think critically while managing emotional pressure. Similarly, Safitri et al. (2022) demonstrate that motivational videos can significantly reduce communication-related stress and boost speaking confidence in English classrooms. Additionally, the learning environment plays a critical role in fostering effective communication. Taman (2020) found that communicative language games create a non-threatening, engaging atmosphere, encouraging even shy or low-proficiency students to participate actively, improve fluency, and expand vocabulary without fear of judgment. These games provide a playful context that reduces anxiety and promotes peer interaction, essential for building long-term confidence.

Ultimately, fostering communication competence requires a holistic approach that blends explicit cognitive practice (e.g., structured speaking tasks and reflection) with sustained emotional and social support, so learners feel psychologically safe to take risks, make mistakes, and develop an authentic voice. In line with this view, evidence from EFL contexts shows that a positive classroom social climate and positive emotions (such as foreign language enjoyment) meaningfully predict stronger student engagement, suggesting that “how it feels to participate” can be as consequential as what is taught linguistically (Mohammad Hosseini et al., 2022). Complementing this, research also indicates that students’ perceptions of a supportive, interactive, and respectful classroom climate relate to higher engagement, which in turn supports stronger academic outcomes—reinforcing the idea that engagement is a key mechanism through which classroom conditions translate into communication growth (Ma & Wei, 2022)

To address the identified practical gaps, the *“Speak with Confidence: A Journey to Effective Communication”* program was introduced at SMKS Kusuma Bangsa as a community service initiative by Universitas Pamulang in April 2025. The program has three explicit operational objectives:

1. Build Confidence: Enable students to speak publicly in formal settings (job interviews, presentations, workplace communication) with reduced anxiety and enhanced self-perceived communication competence.
2. Develop Practical Competence: Equip students with demonstrable skills in articulation, non-verbal communication, message structure, and professional politeness appropriate for workplace contexts.
3. Foster Psychological and Social Readiness: Create conditions for students to manage emotional pressure, practice peer interaction in low-threat environments, and internalize professional communication norms.

Program Structure

This program adopts an experiential learning approach that prioritizes learning-by-doing through intensive public speaking practice, mock interviews, communicative language games, and motivational media to strengthen students’ communicative competence in authentic contexts. Consistent with evidence from simulation-based learning research, the program uses structured simulations (e.g., interview role-plays) to approximate real communicative demands and to develop not only procedural performance but also

interpersonal and teamwork-oriented communication skills through repeated practice and feedback cycles (Lateef, 2010). In addition, the program is designed to cultivate public speaking self-efficacy by embedding practice within collaborative preparation, guided monitoring, and reflective evaluation, which empirical findings show can enhance learners' confidence across key speaking components (e.g., language use, organization, and delivery) (Hao & Chen, 2024).

By combining these elements, the program aims to bridge the gap between students' technical expertise and the communication competencies required in the workforce. The training incorporated the following components: (1) Structured public speaking sessions to improve articulation and non-verbal communication; (2) Mock interviews with constructive feedback to simulate workplace scenarios; (3) Communicative games to create a supportive environment for practice; (4) Motivational videos to inspire confidence and reduce hesitation, aligned with evidence from Safitri et al. (2022).

Methods

Preparation

The community service team was composed of one lecturer and five seventh-semester university students who assumed complementary roles throughout the programme to ensure both pedagogical quality and operational efficiency. During the preparation stage, the team conducted an on-site preliminary visit to the partner school to undertake an open-structured needs assessment aimed at identifying context-specific communication challenges among Grade XII students. Data were gathered through open-structured interviews with the principal, three English teachers, and ten purposively selected Grade 12 students, enabling the team to map institutional expectations, classroom realities, and student-perceived barriers to confident formal communication. The lecturer acted as the community service coordinator by engaging directly with the partner school, overseeing the programme flow from initial coordination to final reporting, and ensuring that all activities remained responsive to the partner's needs while adhering to ethical and professional standards. The five university students assisted the service delivery by coordinating and facilitating the school visit activities, documenting key points from discussions, organizing field notes, and synthesizing the findings into a clear problem map that could be immediately translated into practical training activities for the students and the school. This structured division of labour strengthened the reliability of the

situational analysis by enabling triangulation across leadership, teacher, and student perspectives, while also ensuring that the subsequent intervention design was grounded in authentic partner priorities rather than assumed deficiencies (Hidayani et al., 2025).

Implementation

The community service (PKM) programme from Universitas Pamulang was implemented at SMKS Kusuma Bangsa, Jl. Aster IV Tahap 1, Gelam Jaya, Pasar Kemis, Tangerang, Banten. The program targeted Grade XII students (17–18 years old) who were approaching graduation and preparing for transition into the workplace. The participants consisted of 25 students who were identified through internal school observations as needing support in developing confidence and effective English communication skills for formal and professional contexts, particularly those related to job interviews and workplace interaction. The programme was conducted collaboratively by a community service team comprising one lecturer and five seventh-semester students from the English Department, Universitas Pamulang. The implementation took place over three sessions (two hours per meeting) across 17–19 April 2025 (Thursday to Saturday) to ensure sufficient time for guided instruction, structured practice, and reflective feedback. This design responds to the practical needs of vocational students by providing targeted, hands-on communication support that helps them build real confidence and competence for authentic workplace situations, such as interviews and formal presentations (Hidayani et al., 2025).

The instructional approach was intentionally active and interactive, emphasizing learning-by-doing rather than passive reception. First, materials were delivered through structured input sessions in which the university student facilitators introduced foundational strategies for speaking in formal and professional situations, including demonstrations of public speaking techniques and workplace-appropriate expressions in English. Second, participants were organized into small interview-preparation groups (two to three students per group) to draft job interview scripts based on the concepts introduced, allowing students to collaboratively plan responses and rehearse language forms in a low-risk environment. Third, each group conducted simulated job interviews in front of the class in a rotating format, providing repeated opportunities to practice verbal delivery, articulation, and professional demeanor under observation. Finally, systematic feedback was provided after each performance by the lecturer and mentors, focusing on both linguistic aspects (clarity, fluency, appropriateness of expressions) and performance aspects (confidence, eye contact, posture,

and turn-taking), alongside motivational reinforcement to reduce fear and normalize mistakes as part of skill development. This iterative cycle—input, collaborative preparation, performance simulation, and feedback—was designed to strengthen students' self-efficacy and readiness to communicate in real workplace settings, where formal English interaction is frequently a decisive factor in employability outcomes (Hidayani et al., 2025).



Picture 1: A group photo session was conducted as the opening of the community service (PKM) programme with Ms. Onah Rokanah, the Principal of SMKS Kusuma Bangsa, together with students from the Multimedia major.



Picture 2: Students of SMKS Kusuma Bangsa attentively followed the public speaking material presentation delivered by the Universitas Pamulang community service (PKM) team.



Picture 3: Two students conducted a job interview simulation after receiving training on effective workplace communication.



Picture 4: A group photo session - Universitas Pamulang community service (PKM) team and the SMKS Kusuma Bangsa students after completing the programme activities.

Evaluation

An evaluation of the programme suggests several ways the community service could have been strengthened to produce more robust and sustainable outcomes. First, the three-session format (two hours per meeting) provided valuable exposure but likely limited opportunities for repeated practice and skill consolidation; extending the duration or adding follow-up sessions (e.g., two to four weeks later) would better support retention, transfer to new speaking situations, and gradual anxiety reduction. Second, although feedback was provided after simulations, effectiveness could be increased by using a standardized assessment rubric (shared with participants in advance) and ensuring inter-rater consistency

between the lecturer and mentors; this would make feedback more transparent, comparable, and actionable for students. Third, the evaluation design would benefit from clearer documentation of analysis procedures and triangulation: beyond describing pre–post assessments, results should be derived through explicit quantitative comparisons (e.g., matched pre–post scores, effect sizes) and systematically coded qualitative reflections from students and teachers, enabling claims of improvement to be more defensible. Fourth, the programme could be made more workplace-authentic by involving external stakeholders (e.g., HR practitioners or industry partners) to co-assess mock interviews and model professional discourse norms, thereby aligning training more closely with labour market expectations. Finally, sustainability could be improved by capacity-building for the partner school, such as providing teachers with a replicable module, sample scripts, and assessment tools so that practice continues beyond the intervention.

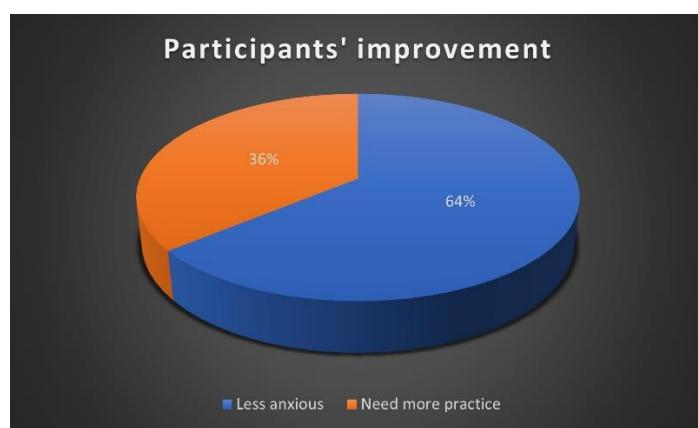
Results and Discussion

To evaluate the impact of the programme, the community service team conducted simple before-and-after checks through direct observation, student feedback forms, and speaking-task performance notes to see whether students became more confident, more fluent, and more appropriate in how they communicated during formal speaking activities. The data generated several notable outcomes in both communicative performance and affective readiness. The training design—combining guided instruction, structured peer interaction, and repeated job-interview simulation—enabled participants to progress gradually from passive participation toward more active engagement and more purposeful spoken production. Throughout implementation, the community service team contributed not only as content deliverers but also as facilitators and mentors: the lecturer coordinated the session flow, ensured alignment with the programme objectives, and provided pedagogical oversight, while the university student facilitators supported demonstrations, moderated group practice, monitored participation, and delivered immediate feedback during simulation cycles. This structured facilitation created a supportive environment in which students could practice under low-risk conditions while still experiencing authentic performance demands.

During the reflection session at the end of the training, many students reported feeling more confident and better prepared to speak in front of others, particularly in formal contexts such as interview settings. A recurring theme in participant feedback was the value of mentor comments provided immediately after simulations, which helped students refine language

choices, improve response organization, and adjust tone and delivery. Peer encouragement also emerged as an important mechanism for participation, as students gradually became more willing to attempt speaking despite initial hesitation. In addition, the programme produced observable shifts in language register. At the beginning, many participants relied on informal expressions shaped by daily slang and social media habits; however, after several rounds of simulation and structured feedback, students began to adopt more formal, context-appropriate expressions and to demonstrate clearer awareness of the distinction between casual and professional speaking norms. The training concluded with a brief awarding session and a recap of key workplace communication strategies. Although the rewards were modest, they functioned as extrinsic reinforcement and helped close the programme on a positive note, while the more substantive impact was reflected in increased participation, improved fluency, and more spontaneous use of formal expressions.

Importantly, the programme outcomes were supported by participant-reported data of the 25 Grade XII participants, 16 students (64%) indicated in the post-programme survey that they experienced increased confidence and reduced anxiety when speaking English during the interview simulation. This improvement is particularly meaningful given early programme observations that several students initially avoided simulation practice due to low confidence and communication anxiety. Taken together, these behavioural observations and self-reported changes suggest that the community service intervention contributed to reducing key affective barriers to speaking and supported the development of communication behaviours more aligned with workplace expectations. At the same time, the fact that some participants remained shy or less willing to perform indicates a need for longer duration practice, differentiated scaffolding, or follow-up sessions to consolidate gains for students who require more gradual exposure.



Conclusion

The community service programme implemented at SMKS Kusuma Bangsa (Grade XII), Pasar Kemis, Tangerang, Banten demonstrated that public speaking training grounded in real-life practice, simulations, and structured group activities can produce meaningful gains in students' workplace-oriented communication readiness. The main impact of the programme was the improvement of participants' confidence to speak English in formal settings, accompanied by observable progress in articulation, fluency, and the ability to manage nervousness during professional interactions such as mock job interviews. This outcome was supported by the learning environment intentionally created by the community service team: students were encouraged to practice repeatedly, make mistakes safely, and receive immediate, constructive feedback without fear of negative judgment—conditions that are widely recognized as necessary to reduce speaking inhibition and support communicative growth (Safitri et al., 2022).

Beyond linguistic outcomes, the programme reinforced the value of integrating psychological and social dimensions into communication training, not limiting instruction to grammar or vocabulary alone. This approach is particularly relevant for vocational students who must demonstrate employability skills alongside technical competence, where confidence, professional demeanor, and context-appropriate language use often determine interview performance and workplace acceptance (Hidayani et al., 2025). At the same time, a brief reflection indicates a clear limitation and opportunity: several students still appeared shy and required more time to participate actively, suggesting that a short intervention may not be sufficient for all learners and that extended scaffolding and repeated exposure are needed.

As a next step, the partner school is strongly encouraged to institutionalize this programme by embedding structured speaking practice (e.g., interview simulation, presentation drills, and peer-feedback routines) into the regular timetable as a sustained agenda. Follow-up sessions, teacher capacity-building, and periodic monitoring (pre–post checks across a longer period) are also recommended so that improvements in confidence and professional communication can be maintained and scaled to future cohorts (Hidayani et al., 2025; Safitri et al., 2022).

Acknowledgement

Praise be to Allah, the Almighty, for His blessings and mercy, which have enabled the English Literature Study Program, in collaboration with the Institute for Research and Community Service, to implement this community service activity and to complete the proposal entitled Speak with Confidence: A Journey to Effective Communication.

In preparing the final report and journal article for this community service programme, we have endeavoured to do our best. Therefore, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to:

1. Dr. Pranoto, Chair of the Sasmita Jaya Foundation, for the opportunity granted to conduct this community service activity.
2. Dr. H. E. Nurzaman, AM., M.M., M.Si., Rector of Universitas Pamulang, for granting permission to carry out this programme.
3. Tryana, S.S., M.A., Dean of the Faculty of Letters, for the support provided in completing this activity.
4. Tito Dimas Atmawijaya, S.Pd., M.Hum., Head of the English Literature Study Program, for guidance and assistance throughout the programme.
5. Dr. Susanto, SH., S.M., M.M., MH., M.AP., Head of LPPM, for extensive support in the implementation of this community service programme.
6. Onah Rokanah, S.Pd.I., M.Pd., Principal of SMKS Kusuma Bangsa, for granting us the opportunity to conduct the community service activities at the school.

Finally, we acknowledge that this report may still contain shortcomings. We sincerely apologise for any limitations and welcome constructive feedback for future improvement.

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