

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SOFT SKILLS OF SMKS MUHAMMADIYAH 1 KOTA AGUNG STUDENTS THROUGH PUBLIC SPEAKING TRAINING

**Akhyar Rido<sup>1\*</sup>, Heri Kuswoyo<sup>2</sup>, E. Ngestirosa Endang Woro Kasih<sup>3</sup>, Shavina Lestiani<sup>4</sup>,  
Rizma Amalia Sa'adah<sup>5</sup>, Edho Anggara Doby Putra<sup>6</sup>, Sahat Parulian Prantinus Kaban<sup>7</sup>**

English Literature, Faculty of Arts and Education, Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia

Email: [akhyar@teknokrat.ac.id](mailto:akhyar@teknokrat.ac.id)

**Abstract:** This article addresses the limited access to language activities and the lack of emphasis on public speaking as a soft skill in vocational high school education. It emphasizes the significance of developing public speaking abilities for vocational students to thrive personally and professionally. The article proposes a social community service program that offers public speaking training for vocational students. The program's effectiveness was evaluated using a descriptive qualitative method and questionnaires. The feedback from students indicates positive outcomes in communication skills, confidence, and overall soft skills development. The article concludes that by addressing the deficiency in language activities and focusing on enhancing soft skills, specifically public speaking, vocational students can better equip themselves for the future and improve their prospects in the real world.

**Keywords:** *School, Public Speaking, English*

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini membahas tentang terbatasnya akses kegiatan berbahasa dan kurangnya penekanan pada public speaking sebagai soft skill di pendidikan sekolah menengah kejuruan. Artikel ini menekankan pentingnya mengembangkan kemampuan berbicara di depan umum bagi siswa SMK untuk berkembang secara pribadi dan profesional. Artikel tersebut mengusulkan program pengabdian masyarakat yang menawarkan pelatihan berbicara di depan umum untuk siswa kejuruan. Keefektifan program dievaluasi dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dan kuesioner. Umpan balik dari siswa menunjukkan hasil positif dalam keterampilan komunikasi, kepercayaan diri, dan pengembangan soft skill secara keseluruhan. Artikel tersebut menyimpulkan bahwa dengan mengatasi kekurangan dalam kegiatan bahasa dan berfokus pada peningkatan soft skill, khususnya berbicara di depan umum, siswa SMK dapat membekali diri mereka dengan lebih baik untuk masa depan dan meningkatkan prospek mereka di dunia nyata.

**Keywords:** *Sekolah, Berbicara di depan umum, Bahasa Inggris*

**How to Cite:** Rido. A., et.al. 2023. Improving the Quality of Soft Skills of SMKS Muhammadiyah 1 Kota Agung Students Through Public Speaking Training. *JCOS: Journal of Community Service*. Vol. 1 (3): pp. 118-126, doi: <https://doi.org/10.56855/jcos.v1i3.426>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's era, access to language activities in vocational high school education is limited. Merely attending regular classes does not guarantee that students will become proficient public speakers (McGrath, 2022). While extracurricular activities like the English clubs exist, students have the freedom to choose whether or not they want to develop their public speaking skills, resulting in a lack of interest (Zhou & Zhang, 2023). According to Grieve et al. (2021), students have various fears associated with public speaking, which negatively impacts their educational performance. This highlights the importance of learning public speaking as it is crucial for effective communication among young individuals. Additionally, vocational schools primarily focus on students' chosen majors, neglecting the need for socialization.

Effective communication activities encompass the development of both hard and soft skills. Hard skills are learnable abilities acquired through practice and instruction. On the other hand, soft skills differ from hard skills as they represent a person's inherent social intelligence, qualities, and adaptability in various aspects of life and the workplace (Doyle, 2022). The Ministry of Education and Culture acknowledges that Vocational High School students require a balance of hard and soft skills. However, statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics reveal a significant imbalance, with Indonesian upper secondary graduates possessing only 10% soft skills and 90% hard skills. This imbalance contributes to their unemployment (Bunyamin, Samsudi, & Rohman, 2022).

Therefore, as a form of effort to develop the value of the soft skills themselves, this is the basis for socialization activities for Vocational High School children, especially in the field of public speaking. Public speaking is a fundamental, but the access to it is limited to the students, especially because the hard skills are constantly being honed. The important point of public speaking is the ability to increase intellectual intelligence in order to be able to communicate well so as to guarantee the future of these students in the future (Doyle, 2022). This training and socialization can be realized through social community service.

The aim program is to maintain the balance of skills a student may possess, both hard skills and soft skills by developing public speaking skills, a crucial soft skill for an individual that can be used in their professional and personal life. The development of public speaking at SMKS Muhammadiyah 1 Kota Agung may be realized with the assistance of lecturers and students, and it is further supported by several other researches that have been conducted (Simons & Liu, 2022; Tanaka & Fukushima, 2023).

## **2. METHOD**

This social community service activity was conducted at SMKS Muhammadiyah 1 Kota Agung on February 4 – March 4, 2023, in 2 sessions. The area was chosen based on the condition of the school, where the school needed to be given access to develop public speaking skills for future debriefing. This activity is aimed at 30 students ranging of grade 11 and 12. This activity was done in a span of one month by conducting 2 offline meetings.

This paper employed a qualitative method approach. This method was chosen in order to properly analyze the activity as a whole process (Smith, Johnson & Anderson, 2023). The stages of Community Service activities are as follows:

1. Preparing proposal of the program.
2. Preparing administrative documents.
3. Creating public speaking training materials for socialization students (Leong & Chan, 2023).
4. Training public speaking with lecturers and students (Smith, Johnson & Anderson, 2023).
5. Evaluating and reflecting the program (Leong & Chan, 2023).

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This PKM activity focused on the students' ability to express their opinions and thoughts in words that are then spoken to in front of an audience. Students concentrated on public speaking performing aspects such as intonation, eye contact, gestures and movements, and fluency to build their confidence in preparing for real-life situations. Students were tasked to do public speaking activities in front of their peers. Each group consists of 15 students with one lecturer as the instructor and two university students as the facilitators.

## Activity

Public speaking is the act of oral communication in front of a group of people or the eyes of the public. According to Astuti (2011), she stated that public speaking is a technique to communicate a message or idea in front of people to make them understand the information or alter someone's view or opinion. Public speaking can be claimed as a crucial soft skill used in many situations such as at the academic level, work level, or even in everyday situations. That is why it is heavily suggested that vocational students who have polished their hard skills during the years attain public speaking skills to help the students be confident in presenting their ideas and having effective communication.

In this session, students were first exposed to the art of public speaking such as the definition, importance, and wide perspective of public speaking in society which was then delivered by the lecturer. This served as a pre-activity to check the students' level of understanding in public speaking. The session was then followed by the university students who conducted a practice session. The vocational students were split into two groups to promote a deeper understanding of a topic and practice the activities. In this session, vocational students were taught to improve their performance quality and share their ideas clearly and effectively. The students were then tasked with practicing their speaking in front of their peers in groups where they practiced their confidence and speech. At the end of each session, students were given feedback from the facilitator.

Post-activity, students were given a questionnaire to know their thought on the session. It gave the facilitators an understanding of how effective the session was and how well the students absorbed the materials. The questionnaire was divided into 7 sections with 7 questions where the students had to choose if they 'disagree', 'slightly disagree', 'slightly agree', 'agree', or 'strongly agree'. The results are the following.



Fig. 1 Explaining the importance of public speaking for vocational student

## Question 1

The pie chart represents the results of a survey where respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of a public speaking session they attended. The chart indicates that all respondents agree that the session was useful, with the majority of respondents, 44.8%, indicating that they strongly agree that the session was beneficial. The remaining respondents, 55.2%, indicate that they agree that the session was useful. Based on this result, we can see that the students may

have had limited exposure to public speaking materials, which could have contributed to their perception that the session was beneficial. The fact that all respondents agreed that the session was useful could also suggest that the contents were well-received and relevant to the students' needs and interests. It is worth noting that while the results suggest that the session was perceived as useful, it is possible that some respondents may have had varying levels of engagement or interest in the topic. Overall, the pie chart provides insight into the perceived usefulness of the public speaking session among the surveyed students.

29 responses

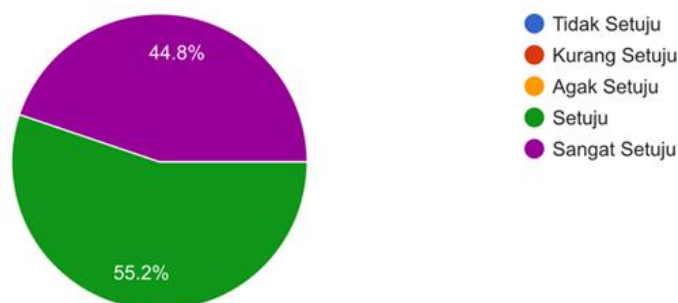


Fig. 2 Pie chart of the survey conducted on the perceived benefits of the Public Speaking activity

## Question 2

Next, the chart shows that 62.1% respondents agree that the session helped enlighten them on how to make an English speech. Moreover, 27.6% is strongly agree, indicating a high level of agreement with the effectiveness of the session. However, it is worth noting that more than 5% of the respondents selects slightly agree, suggesting that they may have had some reservations or concerns about the session's effectiveness in improving their English speech. Additionally, there were some respondents who did not find the session helpful, as indicated by their choice of slightly agree. Overall, the pie chart indicates that the majority of students were able to gain some understanding of English speech through the session, and a significant number of them found it very effective. However, some participants felt that the materials delivered were not sufficient or lacked in some ways.

29 responses

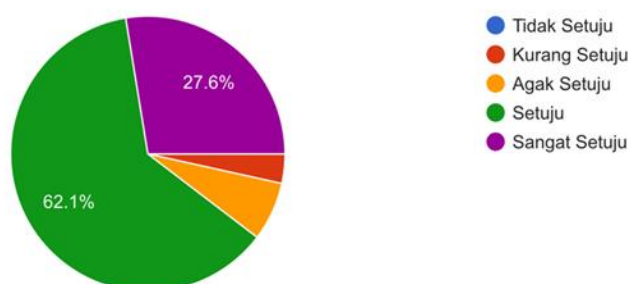


Fig. 3 Pie chart of effectiveness of a Public Speaking activity in enhancing English language proficiency

### Question 3

The following chart shows that 86.20% respondents indicate agreement that the practices were easy to follow. Additionally, 8.9% of students choose strongly agree that the practices were easy to follow. The remaining portion of the chart shows that there were some students who had a slightly harder time understanding the practices. Specifically, the percentage of students who selected slightly agree is the same as those who strongly agree. This suggests that although some students may have found the activities somewhat difficult to comprehend, the majority of the respondents were able to build an understanding of the materials and instructions provided during the session. Overall, the pie chart shows that the majority of students found the public speaking practices easy to follow, which could indicate that the session was well-designed and effectively communicated to the participants. The small percentage of students who found the practices difficult to understand could be addressed by providing additional support or resources to help them grasp the material.

29 responses

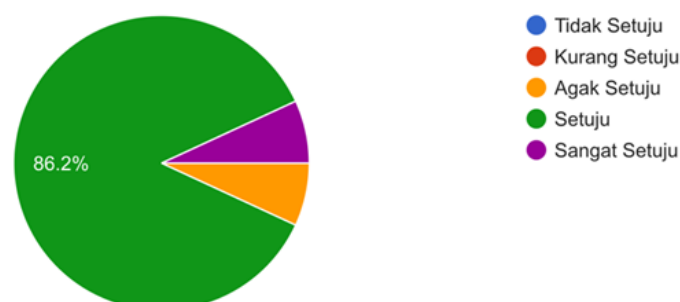


Fig. 4 Pie chart of survey regarding the easiness of the Public Speaking activity for SMKS Muhammadiyah 1 Kota Agung students

### Question 4

The results also show that that 65.5% of the students agree that they thoroughly understand public speaking, making it the largest segment of the pie chart. The second largest segment shows that 20.7% of students choose slightly agree with their understanding of the topic. 10.3% of students slightly disagree that they had a good understanding of the topic, which was a smaller segment in the chart. The smallest segment, 3.5%, represents those students who strongly agree that they understand the material thoroughly. Overall, the pie chart suggests that a majority of students feel confident in their understanding of public speaking, with a significant portion of students expressing partial agreement or uncertainty. This information could be used to assess the effectiveness of the teaching methods and adjust them accordingly to help more students fully understand the public speaking.

29 responses

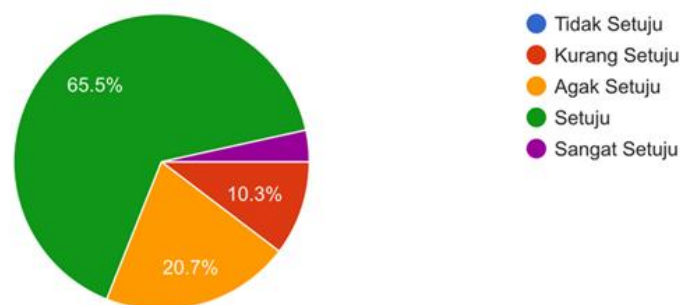


Fig. 5 Pie chart to rate the students of SMKS Muhammadiyah 1 Kota Agung understanding

### Question 5

The pie chart illustrates the results of a survey question that asks students to rate their level of agreement regarding their ability to gain knowledge on tips for making an English speech. The results show that 72.4% respondents agree that they can gain knowledge on the topic, making it the largest segment of the pie chart. Furthermore, 17.2% of students strongly agree that they can learn about the tips for making an English speech. The remaining 10.3% of students slightly agree that they can acquire knowledge on the topic. Overall, the pie chart suggests that most students are optimistic about their ability to gain knowledge on the tips for making an English speech.

29 responses

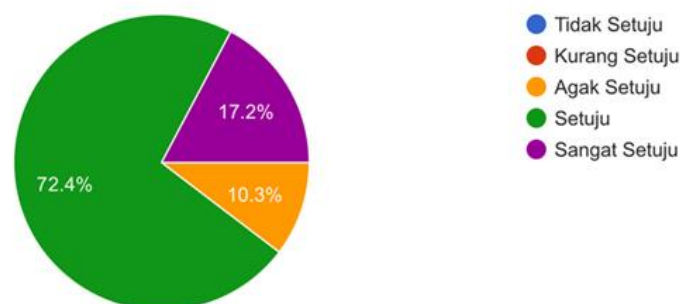


Fig. 6 Pie chart of the results of effectiveness of the practice towards their knowledge of Public Speaking

### Question 6

The pie chart depicts the results of a survey question that asked students about their ability to gain knowledge on the ability to learn public speaking. The chart shows that 79.3% of students agree that they can gain knowledge on the topic, while 20.7% strongly agree that they can learn about public speaking. The pie chart highlights that the vast majority of students are optimistic about their ability to learn public speaking, indicating the importance of public speaking as a skill.

The chart also shows that a significant number of students strongly agree that they can learn about public speaking, indicating a high level of confidence in their abilities.

29 responses

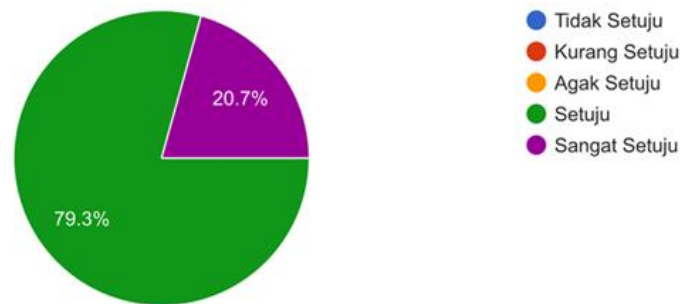


Fig. 7 Pie chart of the results of the effectiveness of the activity in enhancing the participants' knowledge

### Question 7

The pie chart represents the results of a survey question which asked respondents to rate their agreement level on the relevance of the session material to the goal of the practice. The survey results are divided into three categories, with 86.2% of respondents agreeing that the session material is relevant. The second category consists of 10.3% of respondents who rated their agreement level as slightly agree, indicating a higher level of satisfaction with the session material. Finally, the remaining percentage of respondents falls into the strongly agree category, indicating that they did not find the session material relevant to the goal of the practice. The pie chart clearly shows that the vast majority of respondents found the session material to be relevant, with a smaller group indicating an even higher level of agreement. Overall, the chart indicates that the session material is well-received by the majority of participants and is considered to be beneficial in achieving the goal of the practice.

#### 7. Materi pelatihan relevan dengan tujuan pelatihan

29 responses

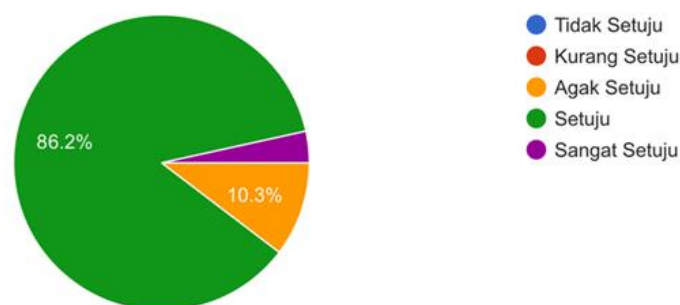


Fig. 8 Pie chart of the results of the relevance of the activity to the activity goal

The public speaking activity conducted for SMKS Muhammadiyah 1 Kota Agung students aimed to improve their communication skills and build confidence when speaking in front of audiences. The students were taught the importance of public speaking and various techniques to improve their speaking skills, such as intonation, eye contact, gestures, and fluency. They were then given the opportunity to practice their skills in front of their peers, and feedback was provided to enhance their performance further. After the session, the students were given a questionnaire to assess their experience, with the results showing that the majority of students agreed that the session was useful, effective in improving their English speech, and easy to follow. The pie charts showed that the students had a good understanding of the materials provided, but some students still found the practices challenging, indicating that additional support may be needed to help them understand the material better.

The results of the activity and the feedback received suggest that the public speaking session was successful in achieving its objectives of improving the students' communication skills and building their confidence. Public speaking is a crucial soft skill that is essential in various situations, including academic, work, and everyday life. Therefore, vocational students must be equipped with this skill to help them communicate their ideas effectively and have successful interactions in their future careers. The public speaking activity provided an opportunity for students to develop their soft skills while also building their confidence in public speaking. The session's success and positive feedback demonstrate the effectiveness of such activities in enhancing students' abilities and preparing them for their future careers.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Public speaking is an essential soft skill for vocational high school students to acquire, as it can improve their chances of success in both their personal and professional lives. However, due to the limited language activities and class hours at the vocational high school level, it can be challenging for students to develop proper public speaking skills. Therefore, outreach activities such as public speaking training can play a crucial role in improving the quality of soft skills of vocational high school students. By providing students with the necessary skills to become effective public speakers, they can develop their communication skills, confidence and ability to adapt well to life and the workplace.

Descriptive qualitative method is used to analyze the process thoroughly. The program's success is evaluated by measuring the students' improvement in their public speaking skills, confidence, and overall soft skills development. Overall, the results emphasize the importance of addressing the lack of language activities and soft skills training in vocational high school education units. It highlights the significance of developing soft skills, specifically public speaking, to prepare students for the real world and increase their future prospects. The proposed program can provide students with access to public speaking training, which can have a significant impact on their personal and professional growth.

The public speaking training ultimately resulted in positive feedback from students, indicating the effectiveness of the activities in improving students' abilities and preparing them for their future



careers. In conclusion, the public speaking session was effective in achieving its objectives of improving the students' communication skills and confidence.

## Acknowledgements

The writers would like to thank Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia for the community service funding and Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat (LPPM) Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia for the administrative support.

## References

- Astuti, K. N. (2011). *Jurus kilat jago public speaking secara otodidak*. Laskar Aksara
- Badan Pusat Statistik. (2020). Tingkat Pengangguran Terbuka (TPT). <https://www.bps.go.id/pressrelease/2020/05/05/1672/februari-2020--tingkat-pengangguranterbuka--tpt--sebesar-4-99-persen.html>. (Accessed on 28 October 2022).
- Bunyamin, B., Samsudi, S. & Rohman, S. (2022). Soft skill improvement strategy for vocational high school students based on career and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning oriented. *Journal of Vocational and Career Education*, 7(1), 65-77 doi: <https://doi.org/10.15294/jvce.v7i1.41103>
- Doyle, A. (2022). What are soft skills? The balance careers. <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-are-soft-skills-2060852> (Accessed on 22 June 2023).
- Grieve, R., Maharaj, R., Glass, B., & Seedat, S. (2021). Fear of public speaking among university students: Social anxiety, language, and cognition. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 82, 102432. doi: 10.1016/j.janxdis.2021.102432
- Leong, P., & Chan, H. Y. (2023). Developing soft skills for vocational high school students: A systematic review of interventions. *Educational Psychology Review*, 35(2), 425-448. doi: 10.1007/s10648-022-09622-5
- Setiawan, Y. (2017). Lulusan SMK Harus Punya Hard Skill dan Soft Skill. SMK Kemdikbud. <https://smk.kemdikbud.go.id/konten/2466/lulusan-smk-harus-punya-hard-skill-dan-soft-skill>. (Accessed on 22 June 2023)
- Simons, R. W., & Liu, X. (2022). The impact of public speaking skills on employability: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Career Development*, 49(3), 315-331. doi: 10.1177/08948453211003634
- Smith, L., Johnson, M., & Anderson, K. (2023). Enhancing soft skills through community service programs in vocational education. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 75(1), 110-129. doi: 10.1080/13636820.2022.2043289
- Tanaka, Y., & Fukushima, M. (2023). Effects of public speaking training on communication apprehension and self-perceived competence among vocational high school students. *Communication Education*, 72(2), 208-225. doi: 10.1080/03634523.2022.2012978
- Zhou, L., & Zhang, Q. (2023). Factors influencing vocational high school students' motivation to develop public speaking skills. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 28(1), 80-96. doi: 10.1080/02673843.2022.2043776