

Enhancing Students' Self-Development Through Public Speaking Training: A Joint University Initiative

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ABSTRACT

Public speaking is a crucial competence for student self-development, strengthening personal confidence, academic clarity in expressing ideas, and professional competitiveness. However, many students continue to face challenges in oral communication, including low confidence, difficulty structuring arguments, and anxiety, often due to limited practical training. To address this gap, a joint community service program between Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) and Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY) was implemented through a one-day workshop that combined core material delivery with guided practice. A pre-training and post-training questionnaire focusing on student perceptions was administered to twenty-one students to assess the effectiveness of the training. Results indicate a noticeable shift in students' perceptions, with many reporting greater confidence in public speaking as well as better knowledge of how to structure stronger argumentation and delivery after attending the training. They valued the opportunity to connect theoretical input with guided practice, expressed highly positive feedback, and emphasized the importance of extending such training to a wider group of students. Overall, the program highlighted the potential of collaborative public speaking training and underscored the value of such community service in shaping future initiatives for broader community impact.

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INTRODUCTION

In both educational and professional contexts, the emphasis on developing literacy, or written communication skills, has been a consistent primary focus. Curricula across all levels—from primary school to higher education—have uniformly prioritized reading, essay writing, and report preparation as key indicators of academic and career success. Yet one crucial dimension of communication is often overlooked: oracy—the ability to communicate effectively and persuasively through speech. This skill, which encompasses public speaking, presentations, and discussions, serves as a vital foundation for teamwork, leadership, and networking. Without strong oral competence, brilliant ideas carefully crafted in writing may fail to be conveyed with maximum impact, leaving a significant gap in the development of individual potential.

At the university level, public speaking has a profound impact on students' overall self-empowerment. On a personal level, the ability to speak in public builds self-confidence and serves as a powerful tool for personal empowerment (Beebe & Beebe, 2015). Academically, students who can clearly express ideas and arguments and actively participate in scholarly discussions are better positioned to contribute to the advancement of their fields (see Bylkova et al., 2021; Fraleigh & Tuman, 2016; Hey, 2024; Lucas & Stob, 2025). Professionally, students with strong public speaking skills often gain a competitive edge in interviews and presentations, thereby broadening career opportunities (see Abella & Cutamora, 2019; Beebe & Beebe, 2015; Fallows & Steven, 2000; Mehl, 2017). Socially, students who are active citizens and able to articulate their views can advocate for change and foster meaningful relationships within democratic life (Sproule, 2012).

Given the broad benefits of public speaking for student self-development, this community service program, grounded in disciplinary expertise (Kelompok Bidang Keilmuan) was proposed in the form of public speaking training. University students were chosen as the target group because they are generally highly motivated to grow, open to learning, and in need of greater self-confidence. At this stage of life, students are generally aware of the importance of communication skills for career advancement and are relatively willing to engage in intensive practice to achieve their goals. This need for self-development and professional preparation is among the strongest reasons why public speaking skills should be cultivated from school or university onward (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2025).

One of the most common challenges encountered by university students—our target group—lies in the gap between the communication skills demanded in academic and professional contexts, on the one hand, and the abilities they currently possess, on the other. Students often struggle with low self-confidence, difficulty in constructing logical arguments, and an inability to manage anxiety when speaking in public. Fear and anxiety in public speaking are, in fact, global issues. Numerous studies have highlighted these concerns and discussed them extensively (see Ahmad et al., 2022; Antolović & Kovačić, 2023; Dansieh et al., 2021; Gallego et al.; Grieve et al., 2021; Kelsen, 2019; Tsang, 2020).

This situation is further exacerbated by the limited contribution of formal curricula in providing practical training, leaving students unprepared for academic presentations, job interviews, and other professional interactions. As a result, their potential may be hindered, affecting both academic achievement and future career success.

Based on the problems outlined above, this community service program was carried out with the primary aims of enhancing students' knowledge and skills in public speaking so that their

communication becomes more effective and impactful. More specifically, the objectives of the public speaking training were to:

- Develop a more positive mindset in students about oral communication, particularly public speaking;
- Train students in developing effective speaking frameworks adaptable to the ideas or content they wish to convey.
- Strengthen the clarity of ideas and the ability to influence audiences through the use of effective speaking strategies.

Public speaking, often framed as part of oracy, has long been recognized as a central component of human communication, yet it has not always received the same level of emphasis as literacy. While curricula across educational levels—from primary to tertiary education—have prioritized reading and writing as markers of academic achievement, oral communication has often been overlooked (Mercer, Wegerif, & Major, 2017). However, effective speaking skills are no less essential. They form the basis of collaboration, leadership, and civic participation, allowing individuals to share knowledge, persuade others, and advocate for change.

In higher education, the benefits of public speaking are multidimensional. On a personal level, the ability to speak confidently in front of an audience strengthens self-esteem and empowers individuals to assert themselves (Beebe & Beebe, 2015). Academically, students who are able to articulate ideas clearly and engage in scholarly discussions are more likely to contribute meaningfully to knowledge building in their fields (Bylkova et al., 2021; Fraleigh & Tuman, 2016; Hey, 2024; Lucas & Stob, 2025). Professionally, effective oral communication is consistently identified as one of the most important competencies sought by employers, giving graduates a competitive edge in interviews, workplace presentations, and networking (Abella & Cutamora, 2019; Fallows & Steven, 2000; Mehl, 2017). Beyond the classroom and workplace, public speaking also plays a social role: students who can voice their ideas publicly are better equipped to advocate for societal change and to participate actively in democratic life (Sproule, 2012).

Despite its significance, public speaking remains a daunting task for many university students. The most pervasive challenge is public speaking anxiety, often termed glossophobia, which is recognized globally as one of the most common forms of communication apprehension (Kelsen, 2019; Tsang, 2020). This anxiety manifests in several ways: low self-confidence, difficulty structuring arguments coherently, and an overwhelming fear of speaking in front of an audience (Ahmad et al., 2022; Antolović & Kovačić, 2023; Dansieh et al., 2021; Gallego et al., 2021; Grieve et al., 2021). For many students, the psychological barrier of fear is as limiting as the lack of technical skills in delivery.

A further contributing factor is the limited role of formal curricula in equipping students with practical speaking experience. While writing courses and assessments remain prominent across disciplines, opportunities for structured oral communication training are often scarce (Fallows & Steven, 2000). This imbalance means that students may excel in writing assignments yet feel unprepared for oral tasks such as academic presentations, debates, or job interviews. As a result, their academic achievement, self-development, and career advancement can be hindered.

Research has highlighted a range of strategies that can help students overcome barriers and develop as effective public speakers. At the core is the use of structured speaking frameworks, which provide students with a clear outline for organizing their ideas, including introductions, logically sequenced main points, and conclusions (Lucas & Stob, 2025; Fraleigh & Tuman, 2016). Such frameworks reduce

cognitive load, allowing speakers to focus on clarity and delivery.

Delivery techniques are another essential aspect of effective speaking. Elements such as voice modulation, pacing, body language, and audience engagement play a significant role in determining how messages are received (Beebe & Beebe, 2015; Sproule, 2012). In this respect, public speaking is not only about the content of ideas but also about the ability to convey those ideas persuasively.

Equally important are strategies to reduce speaking anxiety. Studies have shown that structured practice, gradual exposure, peer feedback, and cognitive reframing of public speaking as a growth opportunity can significantly reduce student anxiety and improve performance (Grieve et al., 2021; Gallego et al., 2021). Importantly, combining theoretical knowledge with practice—through workshops, simulations, and guided rehearsal—has been found to foster positive shifts in students' perceptions of their own abilities and increase their willingness to participate in public speaking situations (Bylkova et al., 2021; Hey, 2024).

Given these insights, public speaking has increasingly been recognized as a core element of student empowerment and employability (see, for example, Setyaningrum, Gusdian, Cahyani & Santoso, 2025). Employers consistently list communication as one of the most valued graduate attributes, ranking it alongside problem-solving and teamwork (Mehl, 2017; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2025). This has led to growing calls for universities to integrate public speaking training more explicitly into their curricula.

At the same time, innovative initiatives outside the classroom, such as community service programs, have demonstrated significant potential in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Such interventions provide students with opportunities to practice public speaking in authentic settings while simultaneously contributing to community needs (Cutamora, 2019). Joint initiatives between institutions also expand the reach and impact of such training, positioning public speaking as not merely an individual skill but a collective resource that empowers both students and their wider communities.

METHOD

Site Selection

In designing this community service program, we selected as the target area a city marked by vibrant social, economic, educational, and cultural life, with a relatively large student population. Cities with these characteristics tend to foster intensive and diverse forms of public interaction and communication, thereby providing a conducive environment for implementing public speaking training. More specifically, the potential target sites were universities located in major Indonesian cities, particularly provincial capitals or special regions such as Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya. These cities reflect contexts where public communication is dynamic, varied, and multifaceted, making them especially appropriate for the program. Further, such cities generally serve as educational hubs where students from different regions converge to pursue their studies in institutions with relatively well-developed facilities.

The target participants for this program were university students from varied academic backgrounds. In principle, the program was intended for students who find public speaking challenging but are eager to learn and to improve their speaking skills at a more advanced level.

After a process of searching and coordinating, the final site and target group selected for this

program were students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY), located in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The decision to select UMY and its students was further strengthened by a formal partnership agreement between the English Language and Literature Study Program of FPBS Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) and the Faculty of Language Education of UMY. This collaboration not only facilitated the program's implementation but also ensured mutual institutional support and recognition of the activity as a meaningful academic and community service initiative.

Participants Selection

A minor challenge was encountered during the recruitment of participants. Since the participation was voluntary, the progress in securing participants developed rather slowly. This was mainly due to the timing of the program, which coincided with the end of the academic break, just before the start of the new semester. In addition, many of the potential participants—particularly final-year students—were simultaneously engaged in the Kuliah Kerja Nyata (KKN) in remote areas.

To address this issue, we implemented several strategic measures, including more intensive promotion through flyers circulated and posted on UMY's official social media accounts, as well as through students who had already registered. As a result of these efforts, we were ultimately able to secure 21 participants from nine different study programs, namely Pendidikan Bahasa Arab (2), Pendidikan Agama Islam (2), Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (10), Hubungan Internasional (2), Ilmu Komunikasi (1), Manajemen (1), Pendidikan Bahasa Jepang (1), Ekonomi Syariah (1) and Teknik (1). Figure 1 shows this demographic information.

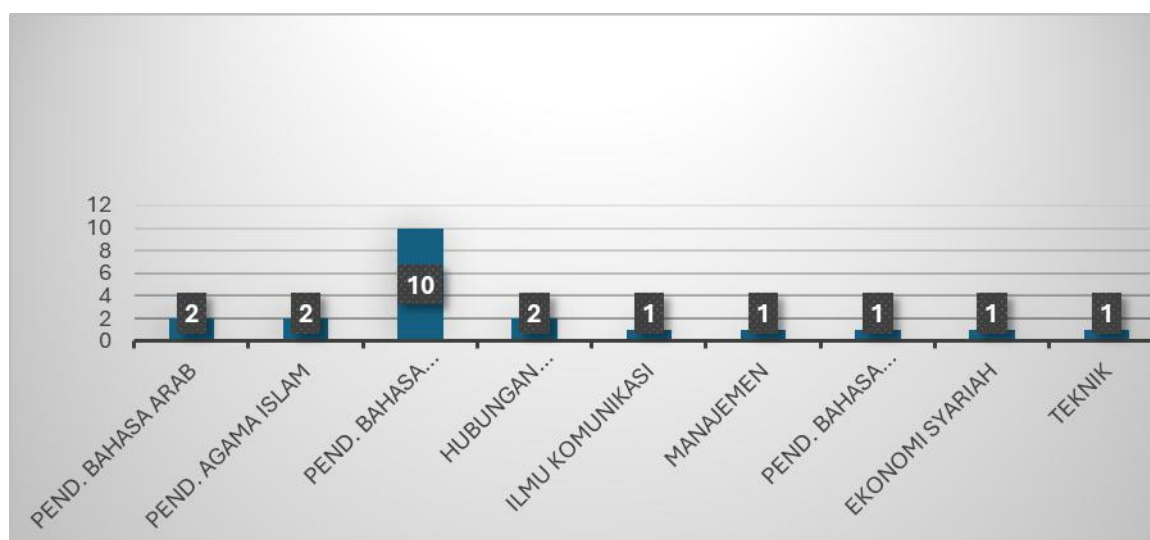


FIGURE 1. Demographic Information on the Students' Faculties

Program Design

This community service was designed as a one-day training conducted in an offline setting, combining the delivery of core material with guided practice in the form of live simulations. The training was led by a lecturer acting as the Master Trainer, supported by other team lecturers who served as Facilitators. The Master Trainer delivered the core content, which covered three main topics: (1) Building a Positive Public Speaking Mindset, (2) Organizing What to Say, and (3) Keys to Understandable and Influential Talks. The Facilitators assisted during the practice sessions by guiding

participants in smaller groups throughout the simulation activities.

In order to gain insights into their initial perceptions and the effectiveness of the training, participants were given questionnaires before and after the training. These questionnaires were designed to capture students' perceptions of several key aspects of public speaking, particularly their fear and anxiety when speaking in front of an audience, their ability to organize ideas, and the strategies they employed to make their speech more influential. For greater clarity, the overall design of the program is illustrated in Figure 2.



FIGURE 2. The flow of the community service program

As Diagram 2 shows, the activities consisted of: (1) distributing a questionnaire to capture participants' initial perceptions of public speaking before the training, (2) conducting the training, which included the delivery of the three core materials, guided group practice, feedback, and observation throughout the process, (3) collecting post-training data through a questionnaire to capture the potential impact of the training and perceived changes among participants, and (4) conducting selective interviews with representative participants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Detailed Stage-By-Stage Implementation of the Program

Specifically, the program involved the following stages: (1) Planning, (2) Preparation, (3) Implementation, (4) Evaluation and Reporting, as elaborated subsequently.

Planning Stage

This initial stage involved brainstorming ideas, aligning perspectives among team members, and preparing a proposal to be submitted under the university's community service scheme. During this stage, preliminary coordination was also conducted with the target audience of the program, technically facilitated by the English Language and Literature Study Program, FPBS Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI).

Preparation Stage

The preparation stage covered the technical aspects of the program, including the development of training materials and data collection instruments designed to measure the impact of the training. This stage also included the mapping of job descriptions for each team member and the detailed organization of field implementation procedures.

For the data collection instruments, two sets of identical questionnaires were prepared to be administered before and after the training. In addition, a semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore some of the participants' perceptions after completing the public speaking workshop.

The preparation stage also involved program dissemination through flyers, as well as logistical arrangements such as travel and accommodation for the UPI community service team. In short, this stage encompassed three key aspects: substantive, technical, and logistical preparation.

Implementation Stage

The training was conducted as a one-day face-to-face workshop. During this stage, participants received customized public speaking materials tailored to their characteristics and needs. The workshop was divided into three main sessions, with short breaks in between. Each session combined core material delivery with practical, guided activities, as shown in the pictures below.



FIGURE 3. Delivery of core content by the Master Trainer



FIGURE 4. Students' guided practice

One lecturer acted as the Master Trainer, delivering the core content, while other lecturers served as Facilitators, guiding participants through group simulations and practice sessions. The core materials covered three main aspects: (1) Building a Positive Public Speaking Mindset, (2) Organizing What to Say, and (3) Keys to Understandable and Influential Talks.

During this stage, data were collected to capture participants' perceptions and observe their engagement during the sessions. Two instruments were used: questionnaires (administered before and after the training) and direct observation by the implementing team during the training.

Evaluation and Reporting Stage

The final stage involved evaluation and reporting. To assess the extent to which the training created impact on the students, data from questionnaires and field observation notes were drawn on. Three main aspects were examined: (1) shifts in mindset or beliefs regarding public speaking practices, (2) understanding of how to organize spoken material effectively, and (3) awareness of how to make speech clear and impactful for the audience. These aspects were analyzed through triangulation of data obtained from questionnaires, observations, and selective interviews.

Upon completion of the analysis, the final report, activity documentation, and draft of the community service article were prepared. It is expected that the outcomes of this program will not only enhance participants' knowledge and skills but also serve as a reference for the wider public and academics interested in similar fields of study.

Insights from Questionnaire Data: From Fearful Learners to Empowered Speakers

The pre-training and post-training questionnaires were identical in nature and were designed to dig into the students' perceptions of the impacts of the training on three key aspects: (1) mindset toward public speaking, (2) knowledge of how to deliver and structure the talk, and (3) awareness of how to make impactful speech. The two set of questionnaires consisted of both closed- and open-ended questions. The comparison of responses gained from the closed-ended questions regarding the aforementioned three key aspects can be seen in Figure 5.

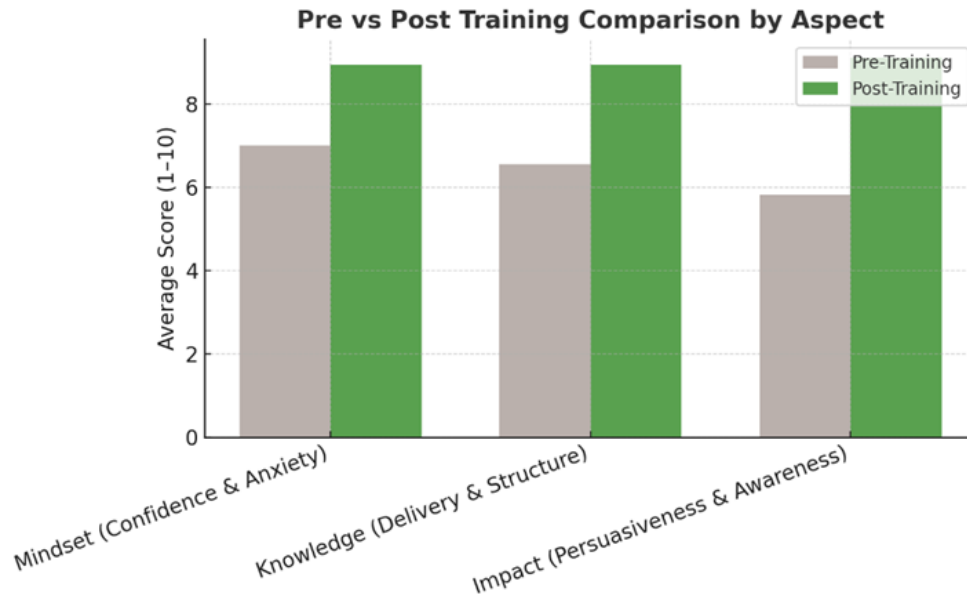


FIGURE 5. Comparison of pre- and post-training questionnaire results

Before the training, students' perceptions of public speaking revealed a moderate level of confidence but persistent anxiety. The average score for mindset (7.01) suggested that while most students recognized the value of public speaking and were somewhat willing to engage in it, many still experienced significant nervousness. They tended to view public speaking as a formal performance rather than a natural interaction, often fearing mistakes or negative evaluation from the audience. Their knowledge of delivery and organization scored slightly lower (6.56), showing that they possessed some basic awareness of how to prepare and structure a talk but lacked consistency in applying these strategies. Many students struggled with transitions, pacing, and vocal variation — aspects that affect clarity and engagement. The weakest area was impact awareness (5.81), indicating that students seldom thought about influencing, persuading, or connecting emotionally with their audience.

Consistent with the above findings, the pre-training open-ended responses were dominated by phrases like *"takut lupa," "takut dinilai buruk,"* and *"tidak percaya diri,"*— indicating a tone of fear, hesitation, and self-consciousness. Many students described feeling nervous, tense, or blank-minded before speaking. Several admitted to avoiding public speaking altogether because they feared being judged or making mistakes. In terms of preparation, most students mentioned relying on memorization or repeating key points without a clear sense of structure. They rarely spoke of engaging the audience or using techniques like vocal variety or storytelling. This reflects a performance-based mindset, where speaking was seen as an evaluative act rather than communicative interaction. Students' goals were primarily to "get through it" rather than to connect, inform, or inspire. Overall, the pre-training data portray students as hesitant yet motivated beginners, familiar with the idea of public speaking but not yet comfortable or strategic in practice.

However, following the training, there was a significant improvement across all three domains. Students' mindset rose sharply to an average of 8.95, showing they had developed a more positive and confident outlook. Many acknowledged that nervousness was normal and could be transformed into productive energy. Their fear of negative judgment decreased significantly, replaced by an understanding that public speaking is fundamentally about connecting with others. The knowledge dimension also rose to 8.95, demonstrating that students had internalized key concepts about how to organize, structure, and deliver their ideas effectively. They showed a stronger grasp of message clarity,

logical sequencing, and the importance of tailoring content to audience needs. The most striking shift was in impact awareness, which leapt from 5.81 to 9.11 — the highest post-training mean. Students reported feeling more confident in using their voices, gestures, and message framing to engage and persuade, and they saw public speaking as valuable for personal and professional growth.

This positive shifts were also reflected in the students' open-ended responses, whereby the language of their reflections changed significantly, with keywords such as "*lebih percaya diri*," "*lebih tenang*," "*lebih paham audiens*," dan "*lebih tahu cara mengatur diri*," recurring throughout. They described learning specific techniques — especially breathing control, visualization, and structuring — to manage anxiety. Several noted their realization that nervousness is normal and even productive, marking a clear cognitive and emotional shift. Others emphasized learning to make their speech audience-centered by organizing content logically and beginning with attention-grabbing openings. One student wrote that they now "see public speaking as a form of conversation," while another highlighted how they "use pauses to control pace and clarity." The overall tone was reflective and empowered, suggesting that students internalized both mindset and methodological improvements.

The contrast between pre- and post-training data reveals a transformative learning trajectory. Initially, students were cautious and self-conscious, focusing more on avoiding mistakes than on communicating meaningfully. After training, their mindset evolved from fearful performance to confident communication. They no longer equated nervousness with incompetence but viewed it as a natural response to be managed. In terms of delivery, they shifted from an intuitive but inconsistent understanding of structure to a strategic awareness of content organization and audience adaptation. Finally, in the area of impact, the data indicate a profound attitudinal and skill-based shift: students no longer saw speaking as one-way delivery but as a purposeful act of connection and influence.

Further, the students' narratives also demonstrate not only a change in skill but also in self-concept: they no longer saw themselves as anxious students performing a task but as intentional speakers capable of influencing others. In short, the qualitative data corroborate the quantitative findings — the training fostered both cognitive and emotional growth, turning apprehension into confidence and transforming reluctant and fearful participants to confident and empowered communicators, capable of not only organizing their speech effectively but also engaging and inspiring their listeners with confidence.

CONCLUSION

The joint community service program on public speaking for university students, organized collaboratively by Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) and Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY), has proven to be a highly impactful initiative in enhancing students' communicative competence, self-confidence, and professional readiness.

The findings from both the pre- and post-training assessments reveal a significant improvement across three major domains: mindset, delivery knowledge, and awareness of impact. Before the training, participants tended to associate public speaking with anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of evaluation. However, after completing the training, students demonstrated a strong shift toward a growth-oriented mindset, characterized by confidence, composure, and the ability to reframe nervousness as positive energy.

Equally important, participants exhibited a deeper understanding of how to structure and deliver a message effectively, incorporating organization, logical flow, vocal modulation, and audience adaptation. Their awareness of making speeches more persuasive and meaningful also increased dramatically,

indicating not only cognitive development but also emotional and social transformation. Overall, the program successfully met its objectives of empowering students to speak with confidence, clarity, and purpose—skills that are essential for their academic as well as professional lives.

The success of this joint initiative underscores the importance of maintaining and expanding similar training programs in the future. Both UPI and UMY are encouraged to institutionalize this collaboration as a recurring intercampus program, potentially involving other universities or schools to broaden the outreach. In essence, this collaborative effort between UPI and UMY has demonstrated the transformative potential of structured communication training. It highlights how joint university initiatives can bridge theory and practice, empower students' voices, and contribute meaningfully to the development of articulate, confident, and socially engaged young leaders.

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