The Communication Skills of Students: Implementing Public Speaking Training in the "Ready for Work" Program

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Abstract. Communication skills are essential for vocational students entering the workforce. This study aims to analyze the relationship between public speaking training in the Ready for Work program and communication skills of students at SMK Negeri 2 Blitar. The research employed a quantitative descriptive correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. Fifty grade XI students who completed the public speaking training program were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using a Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 45 items measuring training quality (20 items) and communication skills (25 items). Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.741$, $p < 0.05$) between public speaking training and communication skills. The training was categorized as good (mean = 75.66), with 56% of students in the "good" category. Communication skills were also categorized as good (mean = 91.18), with 48% of students achieving "good" level. The practical activities component contributed most significantly to the training effectiveness. This study confirms that structured public speaking training in the Ready for Work program effectively enhances students' communication skills, preparing them for workplace demands.

Keywords: public speaking training, communication skills, vocational students, Ready for Work program, correlation

1. Introduction

Communication skills, particularly public speaking, are a crucial competency for Vocational High School (SMK) graduates to face the increasingly dynamic challenges of the 21st-century workplace. According to [1], public speaking skills not only support fluent interpersonal communication but also enhance graduates' competitiveness in the professional world. Public speaking reflects self-confidence, clarity of thought, and the ability to convey ideas in a structured and convincing manner [2]. Although communication competence has been widely recognized as a key employability asset, many vocational high school students continue to encounter substantial difficulties in cultivating these abilities. Persistent issues such as communication apprehension, insufficient formal instruction, and a lack of authentic opportunities to speak publicly remain significant barriers to their development [3]. This situation is particularly concerning, given that communication has become one of the most indispensable soft skills required across modern industrial sectors [4].

A range of instructional interventions has been implemented to address these challenges. Pedagogical approaches such as experiential learning, project-based training, and technology-enhanced instruction have been increasingly adopted to foster students' communicative competence. Digital platforms—particularly webinar-based training—have

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introduced new flexibility and inclusivity, enabling learners to engage in structured and psychologically secure speaking environments. The Ready for Work program, for instance, exemplifies an innovative model of online public speaking training that allows students to practice communication in a guided yet accessible setting.

Empirical evidence underscores the value of such interventions. [2] demonstrated that public speaking training significantly improves vocational students' self-confidence, a psychological construct strongly correlated with communication performance. Likewise, [3] emphasized that limited vocabulary and the scarcity of structured speaking opportunities continue to hinder students' communicative expression, highlighting the necessity of sustained and context-driven training frameworks.

However, despite the proliferation of communication-focused programs, empirical investigations evaluating the effectiveness of webinar-based public speaking interventions remain limited. Most prior studies have emphasized traditional face-to-face instruction and have not fully utilized digital pedagogies to maximize learning outcomes [4]. Consequently, there exists a critical research gap regarding how structured, technology-mediated training impacts vocational students' communication competence.

In response to this gap, the present study aims to empirically examine the influence of the Ready for Work public speaking training on the communication competence of students at SMK Negeri 2 Blitar. Employing a quantitative descriptive–correlational design and a Likert-scale–based instrument, this study seeks to generate robust empirical insights that can inform the design of more effective, measurable, and contextually adaptive communication training models for vocational education in the digital era. The findings are expected to contribute to evidence-based policy and pedagogical innovation in preparing vocational students to meet the communication demands of the 21st-century workplace.

2. Research Methods

This study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive correlational design to determine the effect of public speaking training in the Ready for Work program on the communication skills of students at SMK Negeri 2 Blitar. This design was chosen because data collection was only conducted once through a questionnaire, without using a pretest-posttest model. The correlational method is suitable for use when the research objective is to identify the relationship between two variables without direct manipulation of the independent.

2.1 Research Design

This research employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design utilizing an ex post facto approach, wherein the independent variable public speaking training had already been implemented prior to data collection. The researcher subsequently assessed its influence on the dependent variable, namely students' communication competence, within a single time frame. In essence, this design allows for the identification of associations between variables that have occurred naturally without direct experimental manipulation, thereby offering empirical insight into the relationship between structured training experiences and communication outcomes. The conceptual framework underlying this design can be illustrated as follows:

Table 1. Research Design Framework

Independent Variable (X)	Connection	Dependent Variable (Y)
Public Speaking Training	→	Student Communication Skills
Indicator:		**Indicator:**
• Training materials		• Verbal ability
• Delivery method		• Non-verbal skills
• Practical activities		• Confidence
• Instructor feedback		• Listening ability

2.2 Conceptual Research Model

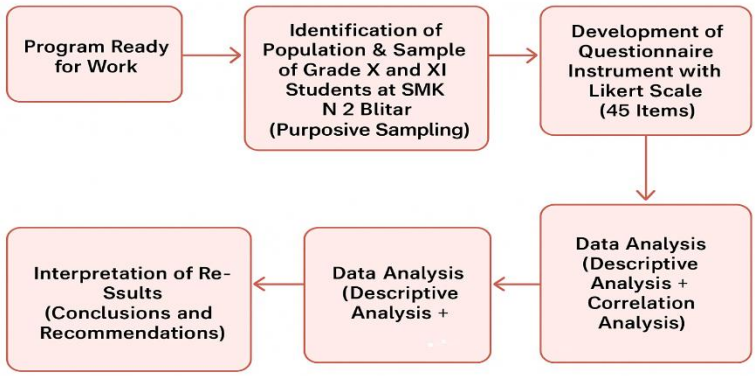

Figure 1. Research Concept Flow

The following is a schematic of the author's research stages:

Table 2. Research Procedures

Stage	Activity	Output
Preparation	Population identification, Sample determination, Instrument preparation	Validated questionnaire
Implementation	Data collection, Questionnaire distribution, Respondent monitoring	Raw data
Analysis	Data input, Descriptive analysis, Correlation analysis	Research result

Reporting	Interpretation of results, Preparation of reports, Conclusions and suggestions	Final report

2.3 Research Subjects

The target population of this study comprised all tenth- and eleventh-grade students from SMK Negeri 2 Blitar who had previously completed the public speaking training program. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants based on specific inclusion criteria: students who had fully engaged in the training sessions and voluntarily agreed to fill out the research questionnaire. This sampling method was intentionally adopted to ensure that the selected respondents accurately represented the study's objectives and possessed direct experience relevant to the variables under investigation [5].

2.4 Research Instruments

The research instrument was a closed questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale consisting of two main parts, namely:

Table 3. Likert scale

Part	Variables	Number of Items	Measured Aspects
Part A	Public Speaking Training (X)	20 items	• Material quality (5 items) • Delivery method (5 items) • Practical activities (5 items) • Instructor support (5 items)
Part B	Communication Skills (Y)	25 items	• Verbal communication (6 items) • Non-verbal communication (6 items) • Self-confidence (6 items) • Listening ability (7 items)
Total		**45 items**	

Table 4. Interpretation of Correlation Strength

Correlation Coefficient Value (r)	Interpretation
0.00 - 0.199	Very low
0.20 - 0.399	Low
0.40 - 0.599	Currently
0.60 - 0.799	Strong
0.80 - 1,000	Very strong

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Description of Research Variables

3.1.1 Public Speaking Training (Variable X)

The analysis results show that public speaking training has an average score of 75.66 on a maximum scale of 100 (Mean = 75.66; Median = 76.5; SD = 12.55). The distribution of respondents by training category is:

Table 5. Description of Public Speaking Training

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	84-100	10	20%
Good	68-83	28	56%
Enough	52-67	10	20%
Not enough	36-51	2	4%
Very less	20-35	0	0%
Total		**50**	**100%**

Based on the categorization per indicator, the following results were obtained:

Table 6. Categorization Public Speaking Training

Indicator	Average Score	Category
Material Quality	19.16	Good
Delivery Method	18.38	Good
Practical Activities	19.74	Good
Instructor Support	18.38	Good

3.1.2 Communication Skills (Variable Y)

The communication skills variable showed an average score of 91.18 out of a maximum scale of 125 (Mean = 91.18; Median = 90; SD = 31.16). Distribution of respondents based on communication skills category:

Table 7. Description of Communication Skills

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage

Very good	105-125	8	16%
Good	85-104	24	48%
Enough	65-84	17	34%
Not enough	45-64	1	2%
Very less	25-44	0	0%
Total		**50**	**100%**

Categorization per communication ability indicator:

Table 8. Categorization Communication Skills

Indicator	Average Score	Category
Verbal Communication	21.16	Good
Non-Verbal Communication	22.26	Good
Confidence	21.38	Good
Listening Ability	26.38	Good

Furthermore, the diagram in the presentation of the distribution of variable X (Public Speaking Training) and variable Y (Communication Skills) can be seen in the following diagram.

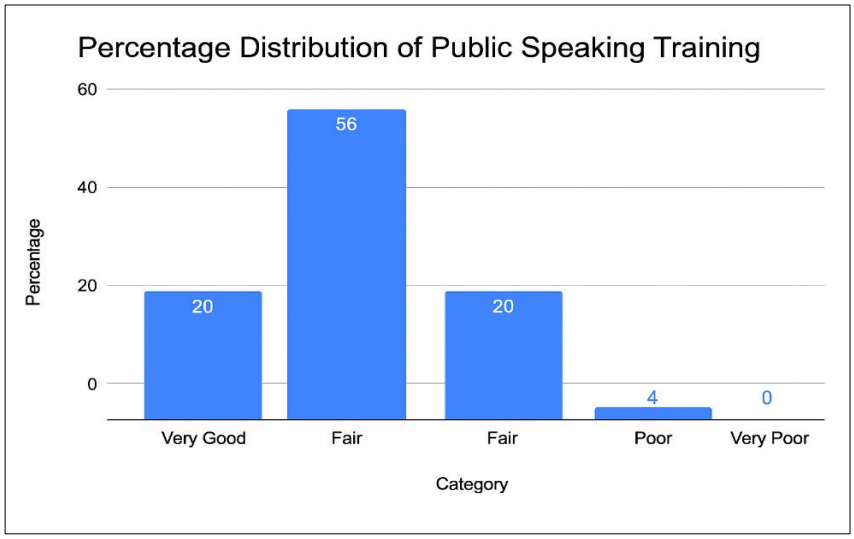

Figure 3. Percentage Distribution Diagram of Variable X

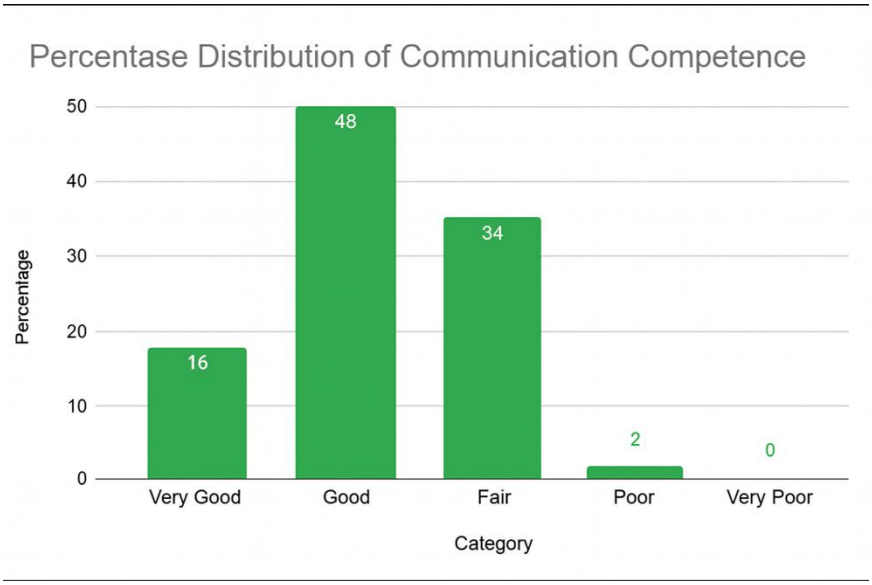

Figure 4. Percentage Distribution Diagram of Variable Y

3.2 Correlation Analysis

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis showed a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.741$ ($p < 0.05$). This value indicates a strong positive relationship between public speaking training and the communication skills of students at SMK Negeri 2 Blitar.

Interpretation of correlation results:

1. Strength of relationship: Strong ($r = 0.741 > 0.60$)
2. Direction of relationship: Positive (the higher the quality of training, the higher the communication skills)
3. Significance: Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

For details on Pearson analysis, please see the following scatter plot.

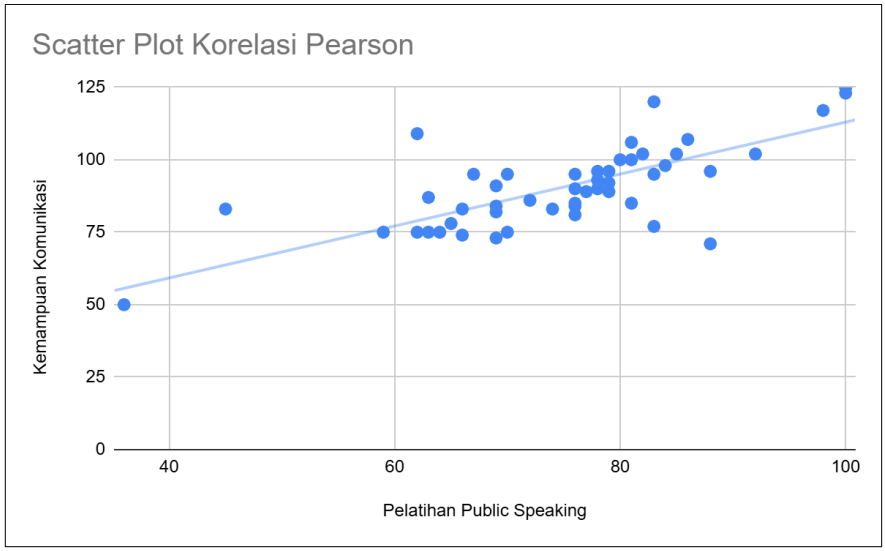

Figure 5. Pearson Correlation Scatter Plot

Based on the resulting scatter plot, a data distribution pattern is seen that shows a positive linear relationship between the two variables, with most of the data points located around the regression line.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a strong and significant positive correlation between public speaking training and students' communication competence ($r = 0.741$; $p < 0.05$). This statistical outcome empirically supports the notion that structured communication training directly enhances communicative performance among vocational students. It resonates with Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within a social context. Public speaking sessions by providing opportunities for modeling and feedback facilitate vicarious learning and self-efficacy development, both of which are central to improved communication outcomes.

In addition, this finding aligns with [6], which emphasizes the cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The public speaking activities within the Ready for Work program operationalize this model by allowing students to practice speaking (experience), receive feedback (reflection), and refine delivery (experimentation), thereby translating theory into communicative competence. The high score for practical activities (19.74) supports this process, showing that hands-on participation was the most influential factor in students' learning progression.

Empirically, the results are consistent with [7], who found that public speaking workshops significantly improved students' presentation performance and verbal fluency. Similarly [8] demonstrated that self-confidence mediates the relationship between speaking practice and communication effectiveness, suggesting that the psychological dimension of confidence is inseparable from technical proficiency. The current study supports these findings

by showing that self-confidence scored high (21.38), reinforcing that affective readiness is foundational for successful public communication.

The findings also extend [9] concept of Emotional and Social Intelligence, where communication competence is understood as an integration of self-awareness, empathy, and social skill. The Ready for Work training's emphasis on empathy-driven speaking and active listening mirrors these emotional intelligence competencies. Interestingly, Listening Ability recorded the highest indicator mean (26.38), implying that effective communicators must balance expressive clarity with empathetic receptivity. This aligns with [10] framework on "Listening Competence," which treats listening not as passive reception but as an active, interpretive, and responsive process integral to communication success.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study strengthens arguments by [11], who demonstrated that assertiveness-based communication training enhances interpersonal effectiveness in vocational students. The current findings similarly suggest that communication instruction grounded in behavioral engagement rather than rote learning produces measurable gains in expressiveness and confidence. [12] also emphasized the anxiety-reducing function of structured speaking practice, a finding reflected here as participants displayed notable improvement in comfort and fluency after the intervention.

The integration of storytelling as a learning strategy, as reported by [13], further explains why students achieved improvement not only in verbal precision but also in emotional resonance. Storytelling situates abstract ideas within authentic human experiences, enhancing message retention and audience engagement. Within the current study, storytelling-based delivery contributed to higher motivation and emotional connection, affirming that communication learning must be both cognitively stimulating and affectively grounded.

Beyond the classroom, these findings have curricular and policy implications for vocational education. As [4] argued, employers increasingly prioritize soft skills such as communication, adaptability, and teamwork. The strong correlation between training and communication ability in this research confirms that integrating public speaking into vocational curricula is not merely supplementary but essential for workplace readiness. In line with [14], this integration cultivates holistic employability competencies, allowing students to articulate ideas, negotiate, and collaborate effectively within industrial settings.

Furthermore, the results substantiate the constructivist learning paradigm, where learners actively construct meaning through interaction and reflection rather than passive information reception. The experiential nature of the Ready for Work training embodies this constructivist ethos, situating communication not as a static skill but as a dynamic, context-dependent practice shaped through continuous social negotiation.

However, the study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference and longitudinal interpretation. Consistent with Cresswel [15], future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to examine sustained impacts of communication training over time. Moreover, integrating digital tools such as AI-based speech analysis, peer-assessment systems, or self-recorded reflections could provide more objective evaluation metrics and align with the digital literacy competencies essential for Industry 4.0 education.

In summary, the present findings demonstrate that structured, experiential, and emotionally intelligent public speaking training fosters not only the technical but also the affective and social dimensions of communication competence. By connecting behavioral practice with cognitive and emotional reinforcement, such programs enable vocational students to develop communication skills that are transferable, adaptive, and aligned with the demands of the 21st-century workforce.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrated a significant positive relationship between public speaking training and the communication skills of students at SMK Negeri 2 Blitar ($r = 0.741$; $p < 0.05$). The Ready for Work program has been shown to effectively improve students' communication skills through practical, hands-on methods.

These results demonstrate the importance of integrating structured communication training into vocational high school curricula to prepare students for the demands of the workforce. However, further research with a larger sample size is needed to strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

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