



Enhancing Public Speaking Skills of Village Youth Through Service Learning and Participatory Action Research Models in Suko Village, Sidoarjo

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Abstract: This community service program aimed to enhance the public speaking skills of rural youth through a service learning and participatory action research (PAR) approach. Conducted in Suko Village, East Java, the training involved 20 members of Karang Taruna "Laksa Muda." The program focused on self-confidence, speech structure, and non-verbal communication. Using experiential learning methods, participants engaged in practice-based sessions, peer feedback, and reflective discussions. Theoretical frameworks included public speaking rhetoric (Ethos-Pathos-Logos), Kolb's experiential learning cycle, and Freire's empowerment pedagogy. Results indicated significant improvement in participants' performance and engagement. The program fostered not only communication skills but also youth leadership and community participation. Supported by BPSDMP Kominfo Surabaya, the model shows strong potential for replication in other villages. This study affirms the role of higher education in empowering youth through context-sensitive training.

Abstrak: Program pengabdian ini bertujuan meningkatkan keterampilan public speaking pemuda desa melalui pendekatan service learning dan participatory action research (PAR). Kegiatan dilaksanakan di Desa Suko, Jawa Timur, dengan melibatkan 20 anggota Karang Taruna "Laksa Muda." Pelatihan difokuskan pada kepercayaan diri, struktur pidato, dan komunikasi non-verbal. Dengan metode pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman, peserta mengikuti praktik langsung, umpan balik sejawat, dan refleksi bersama. Kerangka teoritik mencakup retorika komunikasi (Ethos-Pathos-Logos), siklus experiential learning Kolb, dan pedagogi pemberdayaan Freire. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam performa dan keterlibatan peserta. Program ini turut membentuk kepemimpinan dan partisipasi sosial pemuda desa. Didukung oleh BPSDMP Kominfo Surabaya, model pelatihan ini potensial direplikasi di desa lain. Studi ini menegaskan peran pendidikan tinggi dalam pemberdayaan pemuda berbasis kebutuhan lokal.



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Introduction

Public speaking is one of the essential competencies in the era of open and digital communication.¹ Within the context of village communities, this skill functions not only as a medium for information delivery but also as a strategic tool for building self-confidence, strengthening youth leadership, and encouraging active participation in social development.² However, many village youths lack adequate public communication skills both in technical aspects, content structure, and expressive delivery.³ This limitation becomes a major barrier to optimizing their roles in social forums, local bureaucracy, and entrepreneurial activities.⁴

Such a condition is evident in Suko Village, Sidoarjo District, East Java. The youth organized under the “Laksa Muda” Youth Organization (Karang Taruna) show significant potential in social and community-based initiatives. Yet, they remain underserved in developing their public speaking capabilities. Their lack of experience in public forums and the absence of structured training result in low self-esteem and difficulty articulating ideas effectively. In the context of village digitalization and participatory development, public speaking has become a critical prerequisite for youth to emerge as communicative and competitive agents of change.⁵

Recent studies highlight the importance of public speaking as part of character education and youth empowerment. Anisa and Hariri (2022) found that experiential public speaking training significantly increased students’ confidence in expressing their ideas in public settings.⁶ Similarly, Yusnita and Prabowo (2021) emphasized that verbal and non-verbal communication skills play a pivotal role in boosting youth participation in village deliberations and community activities.⁷ In the higher education context, Rizkika and Lestari (2020) underlined the effectiveness of the service learning approach in developing students’ soft skills, including public communication, through community

¹ The Digital Commons and the Digital Public Sphere: How to Advance Digital Democracy Today, 16 Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture __ (University of Westminster Press 2021). <https://www.westminsterpapers.org/article/id/917/>.

² Empowering Communities to Act for a Change: A Review of the Community Empowerment Programs towards Sustainability and Resilience, 16 Sustainability 8700 (MDPI 2024). <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/16/19/8700>.

³ A Linguistic Analysis of Social Network Communication, 11 International Journal of Society, Culture & Language 119 (LuLu| Katibeh 2023). https://www.ijscel.com/article_701121.html.

⁴ Liwei Zhang, Ji Zhao, and Weiwei Dong, “Street-level Bureaucrats as Policy Entrepreneurs: Action Strategies for Flexible Community Governance in China,” *Public Administration* 99, no. 3 (September 2021): 469–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12730>.

⁵ Alice Fonseca and Paula Castro, “Thunberg’s Way in the Climate Debate: Making Sense of Climate Action and Actors, Constructing Environmental Citizenship,” *Environmental Communication* 16, no. 4 (May 2022): 535–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2022.2054842>.

⁶ Fathia Anisa and Muhammad Hariri, “Public Speaking Training to Improve Students’ Confidence in Public Communication,” *Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 10, no. 2 (2022): 115–25.

⁷ Dini Yusnita and Andri Prabowo, “The Role of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication in Strengthening Youth Participation in Village Forums,” *Indonesian Journal of Community Empowerment* 5, no. 1 (2021): 45–58.

engagement programs.⁸

While numerous studies have addressed public speaking training in school and urban contexts, few have examined the integration of service learning, participatory action research (PAR),⁹ and experiential learning theory (Kolb)¹⁰ specifically within rural youth settings. Previous research has not explicitly linked public speaking development to community empowerment through participatory, context-based, and asset-oriented approaches.¹¹ Additionally, little attention has been given to the collaborative role of university lecturers and village youth in enhancing public communication capacities through structured training models.¹²

This article aims to describe the process and outcomes of a community service program in the form of public speaking training for youth in Suko Village. The training was designed using service learning and participatory action research approaches, enriched with principles of experiential learning and community empowerment. The program was implemented through participatory and practical methods, including learning by doing, group reflection, and hands-on facilitation by lecturers from the Department of Communication and Islamic Broadcasting, Faculty of Da'wah, International Islamic University Darullughah Wadda'wah.

The training design was grounded in three main theoretical frameworks: (1) public speaking theory, including the classical Ethos, Pathos, and Logos model and audience-centered communication;¹³ (2) experiential learning theory by Kolb (1984), which emphasizes the concrete-experiential-reflective learning cycle;¹⁴ and (3) community empowerment theory, notably Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy¹⁵ and the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model developed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993).¹⁶ The integration of these frameworks offers a robust conceptual foundation for designing and evaluating contextually relevant and academically grounded training programs.

In doing so, this study seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of community-based public speaking training models that are collaborative,

⁸ Shafa Rizkika and Diah Lestari, "Service Learning as a Soft Skills Development Strategy in Higher Education," *Jurnal Pengabdian Dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat* 3, no. 3 (2020): 212–21.

⁹ Participatory Action Research, 3 *Nature Reviews Methods Primers* 34 (Nature Publishing Group UK London 2023). <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43586-023-00214-1>.

¹⁰ Thomas Howard Morris, "Experiential Learning – a Systematic Review and Revision of Kolb's Model," *Interactive Learning Environments* 28, no. 8 (November 2020): 1064–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2019.1570279>.

¹¹ Translanguaging Framework for Deaf Education, 8 *Languages* 59 (MDPI 2023). <https://www.mdpi.com/2226-471X/8/1/59>.

¹² Improving Government Communication and Empowering Rural Communities: Combining Public Relations and Development Communication Approaches, 48 *Public Relations Review* 102200 (Elsevier 2022). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811122000558>.

¹³ Stephen E. Lucas, *The Art of Public Speaking*, 12th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2015).

¹⁴ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Prentice Hall, 1984).

¹⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum, 1970).

¹⁶ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (ACTA Publications, 1993).

locally responsive, and impactful in enhancing the capacities of rural youth as agents of social transformation.

Method

This community service activity employed a Service Learning approach in combination with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method.¹⁷ The service learning approach was chosen for its ability to foster active involvement of university lecturers in a learning process based on direct engagement with the community, while also providing reflective space for both participants and facilitators. The PAR method ensured that participants, youth members of the Karang Taruna “Laksa Muda” organization, acted as active agents in all stages of the program, including needs identification, training design, implementation, and joint evaluation.

The target group of this community service was the youth affiliated with Karang Taruna “Laksa Muda” in Suko Village, Sidoarjo Subdistrict, East Java, Indonesia. A total of 20 participants, aged between 17 and 25 years, took part in the program. The training focused on strengthening public speaking skills, especially the ability to speak in public with confidence, clarity, and effective structure.

Both primary and secondary data were used in this program. Primary data were obtained through direct observation of the training process, brief interviews with participants, and facilitator reflection notes. Secondary data were drawn from village documents, the organizational profile of Karang Taruna, and existing literature on public communication training and youth empowerment.

The program was implemented in three main stages. The first stage, pre-training, included initial observation, needs assessment through limited group discussions, and the development of a training module. The second stage, training implementation, was conducted in two main sessions: theoretical sessions (covering public speaking concepts, articulation techniques, and non-verbal expression) and practical sessions (including public speaking simulations, role-plays, and group discussions). The third stage was evaluation and reflection, during which participants were asked to share their impressions, challenges, and experiences, and to complete a reflective questionnaire as part of a participatory assessment process.

Data analysis employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Observational data, interview responses, and reflection notes were analyzed to identify changes in participants’ behavior, increases in self-confidence, and feedback on the training methodology. Success indicators were assessed based on (1) increased active participation during training sessions, (2) observable changes in verbal and non-verbal expression during practice, and (3) participants’ perceptions of the training’s effectiveness, gathered through reflective responses. These outcomes were interpreted

¹⁷ Batsheva Guy et al., “Defining and Navigating ‘Action’ in a Participatory Action Research Project,” *Educational Action Research* 28, no. 1 (January 2020): 142–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2019.1675524>.

in light of experiential learning and community empowerment theories.

Results and Discussion

General Description of the Program

The public speaking training program was held on Friday, 20 December 2024, at the Suko Village Hall, Sidoarjo Subdistrict, East Java, Indonesia. This initiative was part of a community service project based on the service learning model, led by lecturers from the Department of Communication and Islamic Broadcasting, Faculty of Da'wah, International Islamic University Darullughah Wadda'wah. The training was conducted in collaboration with the youth organization Karang Taruna "Laksa Muda" and was supported by the Center for Human Resource Development and Research of Communication and Information Technology (BPSDMP Kominfo) Surabaya.

The program was attended by 20 youth participants aged between 17 and 25, consisting of both male and female members of Karang Taruna. These participants were actively involved in various community and organizational activities at the village level. They expressed strong motivation to join the training, recognizing the value of public speaking not only as a performance skill but also as a critical tool for leadership, community mobilization, and professional development.

The training structure was divided into three main sessions. The first session covered theoretical content, introducing key concepts of public communication, effective speaking techniques, vocal articulation, and the role of non-verbal expressions. The second session focused on practical exercises, including short individual speeches, role-playing activities, and impromptu speaking. The final session was a reflective and participatory evaluation, where participants were encouraged to share their experiences, insights, and feedback on the training process.



Figure 1. Group photo of participants and facilitators after the public speaking training at Suko Village Hall

The facilitation method was interactive, experiential, and participant-centered. Rather than delivering lectures in a one-way format, the facilitators created a space for

active learning through practice, peer feedback, and critical reflection. This approach was grounded in experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984), aiming to strengthen the participants' self-confidence and public speaking competencies through direct engagement and iterative improvement.

Participant Engagement and Interaction Dynamics

Participant involvement during the training showed a significant increase in both energy and confidence throughout each session. In the early stages of the program, some participants appeared reserved and hesitant when asked to speak in front of their peers. However, by the second session, most began to exhibit improved engagement voluntarily participating in role-play activities, responding to prompts, and supporting one another during speech simulations.

The training's interactive format was instrumental in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Group dynamics began to shift positively as participants offered verbal encouragement and constructive feedback to their peers. Facilitators applied ice-breaking activities, movement-based exercises, and team challenges to foster comfort and dissolve initial communication barriers. One popular session included an improvisational speaking game, where participants were randomly assigned topics and encouraged to deliver short, spontaneous speeches. These moments were filled with laughter, mutual encouragement, and a tangible sense of growth among the participants.



Figure 2. A facilitator leads an improvisational public speaking simulation; participants engage enthusiastically in group-based expression exercises

Such moments not only reduced anxiety but also stimulated active listening and interpersonal bonding. By the end of the training, participants who had initially remained silent began initiating questions, volunteering first to perform, and engaging in group reflection without hesitation. This transformation reflects the core principles of participatory action research (PAR) particularly the concept of empowerment through

shared experiences and peer-to-peer learning.¹⁸

The dynamic interaction observed throughout the training underscores the effectiveness of experiential and participatory pedagogy in enhancing youth communication capacity. It also indicates that public speaking skills, often assumed to be tied to personality or formal education, can in fact be nurtured through supportive, grassroots-level engagement strategies tailored to local contexts.

Changes in Competence (Before-After)

The public speaking training produced observable changes in participants' competencies over the course of the program. Based on facilitator observations, reflective notes, and participant responses, several improvements were noted across three key dimensions: self-confidence, message structure, and non-verbal delivery.

1. Increased Self-Confidence

At the beginning of the training, a number of participants expressed discomfort with public speaking. They showed signs of performance anxiety such as avoiding eye contact, speaking softly, or relying heavily on filler words. However, by the end of the second practice session, many of these behaviors diminished. Participants spoke with greater clarity and vocal presence, and some of the more reserved individuals volunteered to be the first to speak without prompting. These behavioral shifts reflect internalized gains in confidence a primary goal of the training.

2. Improved Message Structure and Clarity

Another significant area of progress was in the organization of speech content. Initially, participant speeches lacked structure, often jumping between unrelated points. After receiving guidance on outlining key ideas using the Ethos-Pathos-Logos model, many participants began applying structured openings, transitions, and conclusions in their delivery. This shift indicates that theoretical concepts were not only understood cognitively but also integrated into practical performance.

3. Enhanced Non-Verbal Communication

Participants also improved their non-verbal expressiveness an essential element of effective public speaking. Over time, body posture, gestures, and facial expressions became more aligned with their verbal messages. During role-playing activities, participants increasingly maintained appropriate eye contact, used hand gestures purposefully, and projected emotional tone matching their content. These developments suggest that participants began to see communication as both verbal and embodied, aligning with the experiential learning process.

The combination of practice-based sessions, peer feedback, and facilitator coaching contributed to this improvement. As proposed by Kolb (1984), experiential learning occurs most effectively when learners engage in a cycle of action, reflection, conceptualization, and re-application.¹⁹ The training was intentionally designed to

¹⁸ Fran Baum, Colin MacDougall, and Danielle Smith, "Participatory Action Research," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 60, no. 10 (2006): 854-57, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2004.028662>.

¹⁹ Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*.

support this cycle, allowing participants to revisit and refine their skills through iterative feedback loops.

Qualitative reflections from participants further support this conclusion. Several noted that, “at first I felt awkward and unsure, but after practicing and getting feedback, I feel more ready to speak in public.” Such testimonials affirm the relevance of the pedagogical approach and the importance of context-sensitive communication training.

Theoretical Analysis

The results of this training program align closely with the theoretical foundations upon which it was designed, particularly Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory, Freire’s Empowerment Pedagogy, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, and classical Public Speaking Theory.

1. Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb)

Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model emphasizes a four-stage cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This training followed that model almost precisely. Participants began with real-time speaking exercises (concrete experience), reflected on their performance through group feedback (reflective observation), internalized strategies taught by facilitators (conceptualization), and then reapplied these insights in subsequent simulations (experimentation). The observed behavioral improvements confirm that learning occurred not just cognitively but through embodied practice a core principle of experiential learning.

2. Empowerment and Community-Based Learning (Freire and ABCD)

Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy advocates for the transformation of learners into active co-creators of knowledge. In this training, facilitators moved away from a one-directional teaching model and emphasized participatory dialogue, collaborative exercises, and shared reflection. The process enabled participants particularly those with limited prior experience to gain ownership of their learning journey. This shift is in line with the empowerment paradigm, where knowledge is not merely transmitted but constructed within the learner’s social reality.

In addition, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach was implicitly applied by recognizing and building upon the existing potential of Karang Taruna members. Instead of viewing participants as lacking communication skills, the program treated their existing social involvement and organizational experience as a foundation for further growth. This positive framing helped cultivate a sense of self-worth and collective efficacy.

3. Public Speaking Theory (Ethos–Pathos–Logos)

The participants’ speeches evolved notably after being introduced to Aristotle’s rhetorical triad Ethos (credibility), Pathos (emotional appeal), and Logos (logic and structure). As seen during final simulations, participants began to structure their messages more persuasively: opening with personal stories (Pathos), providing reasons or logical flow (Logos), and concluding with confident, upright posture and tone (Ethos). The incorporation of these elements highlights that public speaking can

be taught effectively even in community-based, non-formal settings, given the right tools and guidance.

Together, these theoretical frameworks provide a strong explanation for the observed outcomes of the training. They also reaffirm the value of blending academic theory with practical community engagement, especially when aiming to develop soft skills in rural youth populations.

Challenges and Field Reflections

While the overall execution of the public speaking training was successful, several challenges emerged during the implementation phase that offered important learning points for future programs.

1. Technical and Logistical Constraints

The training was held in the village hall, which, while accessible and familiar to participants, lacked certain support facilities such as sound amplification tools, projectors, or acoustic treatment. As a result, facilitators had to adapt their delivery styles raising their voices, simplifying visuals, and relying more on interactive oral techniques rather than multimedia presentations. This constraint, however, unintentionally reinforced the emphasis on direct interpersonal communication, which aligned well with the theme of public speaking.

Time management also presented a challenge. The program was originally planned to run for a full day, but adjustments had to be made due to overlapping village events and the participants' other commitments. This required on-the-spot restructuring of the module into more concise segments without sacrificing core content.

2. Varied Levels of Initial Competence

Participants arrived with diverse backgrounds and communication abilities. Some were active in youth organizations or accustomed to public forums, while others had little to no experience speaking in front of groups. This disparity created an initial imbalance in participation. However, facilitators addressed this by applying differentiated instruction pairing less confident individuals with stronger peers, using supportive group formats, and celebrating small wins. These strategies gradually narrowed the gap and encouraged equitable participation.

3. Cultural Dynamics and Learning Preferences

As is common in many village communities, modesty and restraint are valued social traits, particularly among young women. Facilitators had to be mindful of cultural sensitivities when encouraging participants to express themselves boldly. They adopted culturally attuned language and allowed participants to choose roles and topics that felt authentic to their identities. This adaptive approach helped create a psychologically safe environment, fostering genuine engagement without imposing external norms.

4. Reflection from the Facilitators' Perspective

For the facilitators lecturers from the Communication and Islamic Broadcasting Department this training became a rich site of professional and

pedagogical reflection. Engaging directly with village youth, adjusting academic content to real-life settings, and witnessing firsthand how theory translates into community transformation offered valuable insights. It affirmed that community service is not a one-way intervention, but rather a mutual learning process that benefits both educators and citizens.

These challenges, though initially viewed as obstacles, ultimately contributed to the depth and responsiveness of the training. They reinforced the need for flexibility, humility, and contextual intelligence when conducting capacity-building programs in community-based settings.

Implications and Sustainability Opportunities

The outcomes of this training program offer several important implications for future community-based educational initiatives, particularly in rural youth empowerment. First and foremost, the significant improvement in participants' communication abilities demonstrates that public speaking often considered an elite or urban-centric skill can be effectively cultivated in village contexts when approached through participatory, reflective, and culturally grounded methods. The use of service learning and PAR not only enhanced individual skills but also activated a communal spirit of learning, trust, and mutual encouragement. These findings support the idea that soft skill development is not confined to formal education institutions but can be nurtured through grassroots collaboration between universities and local communities.

Beyond individual gains, the training has opened opportunities for sustained impact at the organizational level. Several participants expressed interest in applying their new skills in upcoming community events, such as hosting village meetings, serving as master of ceremonies (MC), and even producing digital content for social media and youth campaigns. This suggests that the training has laid a foundation for the development of youth leadership pipelines and potentially a community-based speaker or content creator forum that could contribute to local economic and social development.

The collaboration with BPSDMP Kominfo Surabaya also introduces the possibility of scaling this model through digital literacy programs or national community empowerment frameworks. Given that many rural youth are already active on social media platforms, integrating public speaking with basic media production skills could amplify their voices, allowing them to represent their communities on broader platforms.

In light of these implications, it is recommended that similar training be adapted and replicated in other rural areas, particularly those with active youth organizations such as Karang Taruna. The model's flexibility combining academic insight with field adaptation makes it suitable for diverse local contexts. Furthermore, sustained collaboration between universities, government agencies, and village institutions can ensure that such initiatives are not one-off interventions but part of a long-term capacity-building ecosystem. In this way, public speaking becomes more than a skill it becomes a tool for transformation, advocacy, and inclusive development.

Conclusion

This community-based public speaking training for youth in Suko Village proved to be an effective and contextually relevant initiative to enhance essential communication skills among rural youth. Through a combination of service learning and participatory action research approaches, the program facilitated not only technical skill development such as vocal articulation, speech structure, and non-verbal expression but also intangible outcomes including increased self-confidence, critical reflection, and group cohesion. The learning process was greatly enhanced by experiential methods that allowed participants to engage actively and meaningfully throughout the sessions.

The training model drew strength from its theoretical foundation in experiential learning (Kolb), community empowerment (Freire and ABCD), and public speaking rhetoric (Ethos, Pathos, Logos). These frameworks supported a learning environment where participants were treated not as passive recipients but as co-creators of knowledge. The facilitators' ability to adapt academic methods to grassroots realities contributed significantly to the program's success.

One of the most significant contributions of this initiative lies in its potential for replication and sustainability. The participants' enthusiasm to apply their skills in real-life village contexts such as local events, organizational leadership, and digital platforms suggests that the training sparked not only learning but also momentum for continued growth. Furthermore, the collaboration with BPSDMP Kominfo Surabaya created a bridge between academic institutions and governmental support structures, signaling potential for scale and policy integration.

Despite limitations in infrastructure, time, and initial participant readiness, the program demonstrated that with culturally sensitive facilitation, community ownership, and an iterative learning model, youth in rural areas can meaningfully enhance their public speaking competencies. Future programs may build upon this foundation by incorporating digital communication tools, ongoing mentoring, and peer-led follow-ups to sustain long-term impact.

In conclusion, this project reaffirms the role of higher education institutions not merely as centers of knowledge production, but as partners in social transformation especially when learning is rooted in service, action, and local relevance.

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