



BUILDING SOFT SKILLS FOR VILLAGE OFFICIALS: A SIMULATION-BASED PUBLIC SPEAKING TRAINING APPROACH

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ABSTRAK

Program otonomi daerah memberikan kewenangan kepada pemerintah lokal untuk mengelola potensi wilayah, meningkatkan kualitas layanan publik, serta mendorong partisipasi masyarakat. Kompetensi aparat desa menjadi tantangan dalam mewujudkan pelayanan publik yang efisien dan berorientasi pada masyarakat. Salah satu hambatan yang teridentifikasi adalah keterbatasan keterampilan aparat desa untuk berbicara di depan umum yang dapat mengganggu efektivitas penyampaian pesan dan melemahkan tingkat partisipasi publik. Kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan aparat desa melalui pelatihan public speaking berbasis metode simulasi. Metode ini memungkinkan peserta untuk merekonstruksi situasi yang menyerupai kondisi nyata, sehingga memperkuat pemahaman, daya ingat, dan keterampilan praktis. Pelatihan diselenggarakan dengan mengombinasikan pembelajaran verbal dan praktik langsung, yang dinilai efektif untuk pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman. Hasil evaluasi pelatihan menunjukkan adanya peningkatan dalam pemahaman dan keterampilan peserta terkait teknik dasar berbicara di depan umum. Temuan dari kegiatan ini juga menekankan pentingnya rancangan pelatihan yang adaptif terhadap kebutuhan peserta, antara lain perlunya alokasi waktu yang lebih panjang untuk sesi simulasi serta pemanfaatan media pembelajaran tambahan seperti video praktik public speaking yang representatif. Keberlanjutan program akan diperkuat melalui pelatihan kompetensi tambahan yang disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan lapangan dan melibatkan Karang Taruna untuk membentuk ekosistem komunikasi publik yang inklusif dan partisipatif sejak dini.

ABSTRACT

The regional autonomy program grants greater authority to local governments to manage their potential, improve public services, and encourage community participation. Ensuring public services are efficient and community-oriented poses distinct difficulties for village officials. Village officials' service quality is significantly influenced by their competency. A lack of public speaking proficiency among village officials can obstruct effective message delivery and weaken public participation. This community service initiative aims to enhance the soft skills of village officials through public speaking training based on simulation method. This method enables participants to simulate situations similar to real-life conditions, enhancing comprehension, memory, and hands-on skills. The training combines oral teaching with hands-on practice, which is considered effective for experience-based learning. Training evaluation results indicate an improvement in participants' understanding and skills related to fundamental public speaking techniques. The findings from this activity also emphasize the importance of training designs that are adaptive to participants' needs, including the necessity for longer allocated time for simulation sessions and the use of additional learning media such as representative public speaking practice videos. The sustainability of the program will be strengthened through additional competency training fit with field needs and involving Karang Taruna to form an inclusive and participatory public communication ecosystem from an early age.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's regional autonomy policy is a strategic initiative that aims to accelerate local economic growth (Darmawan, 2023; Sofiani et al., 2024). The policy is carried out with the expectation of greater government responsiveness to community needs, enhanced effectiveness in public service delivery, and strengthened citizen participation in decision-making processes. Village, as the smallest unit of government, plays a crucial role in the implementation of decentralization due to its direct engagement with the community.

An important implication of decentralization is the expanded space for citizen engagement in the processes of public policy planning and evaluation. Harsanto et al., (2017) indicate that the authority delegation to local governments creates opportunities for communities to actively participate in the formulation of development programs based on local needs. Consequently, communities are not merely beneficiaries, but also active agents in the development process (Darmawan, 2023).

Kalisidi Village, located in West Ungaran Subdistrict, Semarang Regency, is one of the villages with a relatively diverse economic potential. This potential includes the agricultural sector, plantations, tourism, as well as various forms of home industries and small to medium business. However, Kalisidi faces challenges in delivering high-quality basic services in timely, accurate, and accountable manner, while still prioritizing community participation and social ethics. In this context, citizen involvement through physical contribution, ideas, or financial resources—becomes crucial in supporting the functioning of village governance (Yunita & Idrus, 2023; Irawan, 2018).

One of the factors influencing the level of community participation in villages is village officials' ability to convey information clearly and persuasively. The success of such communication largely depends on their public speaking skills. It is stated that effective communication has the power to mobilize communities to actively participate in development initiatives. Therefore, village officials need to possess strong public communication skills to prevent misunderstandings in information delivery that could hinder community engagement (Prihatini & Noverin, 2019; Sartika & Konadi, 2022).

When village officials are able to communicate messages effectively, the community feels involved, heard, and motivated to contribute to various government programs. Therefore, public speaking training for village officials serves as a strategic step in enhancing the quality of public service delivery and fostering citizen engagement. As demonstrated by Nurkhin et al., (2023) and Zulkenedi et al., (2023) community service activities through training is proven effective in improving human resource quality. In line with this, investing in village officials' training and capacity development can strengthen their ability to deliver inclusive and professional services, particularly by enhancing their public communication skills

In addition to serving as a communication tool, public speaking skills also play a vital role in fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility between the village government and the community (Zulkifli et al., 2016). Waheduzzaman et al., (2017) add that public speaking skills can serve as a communication bridge that strengthens collaboration between local governments and communities, reduces information gaps, and enhances public trust in village governance.

Based on the situational analysis and identified issues in Kalisidi Village, this community service initiative aims to enhance the soft skills of village officials, particularly in the area of public speaking. Through a better understanding of effective public speaking techniques and appropriate communication ethics, village officials are expected to establish more effective communication with the community, encourage citizen participation, and deliver higher-quality public services.

METHOD

This community service activity was conducted using a participatory approach and a practice-based training method (experiential learning), designed to enhance the public communication skills of village officials. Experiential learning is an approach that emphasizes the learning process through direct experience. This theory facilitates knowledge acquisition by engaging participants in practical activities that enable the application of theoretical concepts in real situations (S., 2016). This method can be effectively applied in public speaking training to enhance speaking skills directly.

This community service activity, participants engaged in role-play exercises that allowed them to experience the challenges of speaking before different types of audiences. This approach was designed to boost their confidence and adaptability in real-life situations. This is supported by Somantri and Wanti (2023), who reported that a combination of lecture and role-play methods had a positive impact on communication skills, with participants

achieving an average understanding rate of 70%.

The role-play and simulation sessions were followed by participatory observation, in which instructors actively involved in the implementation process, offering insights and evaluating participants' performance. The target group for this activity consisted of village officials in Kalisidi Village. The program was also supplemented with a public speaking training module, developed by consulting with the training instructor, who is also a professional public speaker.

The community service activity was conducted in four stages. Planning stage involved a training needs analysis and training module preparation. Second stage was a pre-test. The third stage comprised the training implementation itself, consisting of presentations by training instructor and role-play methods. The fourth and final stage involved conducting a post-test and training evaluation



Picture 1. Oral presentation by trainer in community service activity

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Planning Stage

The series of community service activities began with a training needs analysis

conducted one week prior to the training. This analysis focused on the village officials' perceptions of the meaning of citizen involvement as well as their everyday experiences with public speaking. The first point of analysis, which aimed to understand the village officials' interpretation of citizen involvement, is summarized in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Summary of the Training Needs Analysis Results about Meaning of Community Participation

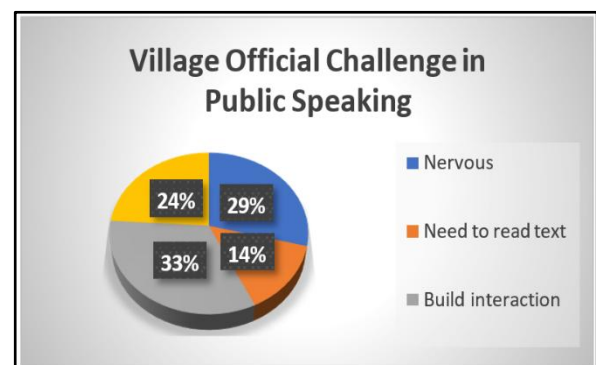
Village Officials' of Community Participation	%
Citizens attend village activities	35
Citizens comply Village Head decision	9
Citizens listen to village officials' direction	16
Citizens provide suggestions during forums	35
Citizens appoint representatives to attend activities	5

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the majority of village officials perceive participation primarily as citizens' attendance at village activities and their provision of suggestions during village forums. This became initial discussion point in the training, emphasizing that participation is not limited to attendance at village meetings but also includes active contributions in various aspects such as planning, implementation, and evaluation of activities carried out by the village government

Active citizen participation involves community engagement in building and maintaining strong social bonds within their

environment. Furthermore, citizen involvement in monitoring development planning can help ensure that the aspirations and needs of the community are reflected in the village development planning documents, which ultimately enhances the transparency and accountability of the village government (Aqilla & Rahmasari, 2024; Putra & Mursyidah, 2023).

The second point of the training needs analysis concerns the challenges faced by village officials when speaking in public. Based on Figure 1, it can be concluded that the majority of village officials struggle to engage with the audience, experience nervousness or anxiety when speaking in public, and have difficulty organizing appropriate words. These findings were communicated to the training instructor to provide a clearer picture of the participants' conditions, enabling the instructor to tailor the content accordingly during the training sessions—particularly during the role-play exercises.



Picture 2. Village Officials Challenge in Public Speaking

2. Pre-Test

The community service activity was successfully held on Tuesday, June 11, 2025, at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Semarang. The training was attended by 25 village officials from Kalisidi

Village, including the Village Secretary, Section Heads, Village Staff, members of Badan Permusyawaratan Desa (BPD), and community leaders. The session was facilitated by Mr. Bayu Bagas Hapsoro, S.E., M.M., a lecturer in the Management Study Program at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Semarang, who also brings extensive professional experience as a public speaker across various media platforms.

The training began with a pre-test assessing general public speaking techniques, such as preparation for public speaking, structuring engaging and effective language, and building audience focus and attention. The pre-test, which consisted of multiple-choice questions, yielded results presented in Table 2. These results indicate that while participants demonstrated a reasonable level of understanding, there remains a need to strengthen foundational concepts of effective communication and techniques for engaging the audience

Table 2. Pre-Test Result

No	Question	Percentage
1	Methods to ensure the message is understood by the community	80%
2	Actions to take when the audience is not paying attention	72%
3	Key preparations before speaking in public	68%
4	Ways to make the audience interested in the speech	76%

3. Training Impelentation Stage

Second stage involved the delivery of material by the training instructor using a lecture-based method. The presentation of the material was conducted based on the training module that had een developed, as well as the findings from the previously conducted needs analysis. This ensured that the content addressed the specific challenges and learning objectives relevant to the participants.

The next stage is, the information conveyed during the lecture was applied through simulations or role-play activities. During these role-play sessions, participants were trained to construct and deliver persuasive, inspiring, and convincing messages aiming to encourage community members to support village programs.

Three specific situational scenarios were simulated: (1) encourage citizens to regularly attend Posyandu, (2) inviting citizens to participate in gotong royong activities, and (3) responding a complain from citizen who were not selected as recipients of government business assistance programs. Role-play was followed by reflections session. It was concluded that participants faced several challenges namely difficulties in communicating the benefits of village programs in a compelling manner, motivating citizens who showed a lack of interest in village affairs, and the fear of offending individuals who may be facing personal or socioeconomic difficulties.

4. Post-Test and Training Evaluation

The fourth stage was a post-test related to general public speaking techniques. Based on

Table 4, it can be observed that the percentage of correct answers across all question components increased. The most significant improvement was seen in the component concerning about main preparations before

speaking in public. Meanwhile, the smallest increase occurred in the component related to methods for ensuring the message is understood by the community.

Table 3. Public Speaking Role Play Reflection Situation

No	Situation	Participant Impression	Challenge	Insight
1	Posyandu Activity	Feel more confident after practicing	Having difficulty conveying the benefits of Posyandu in an engaging manner	Use simple language that is familiar and close to citizens' daily life
2	Gotong royong	Realize the importance of intonation and body language	Confused about how to motivate residents who are less concerned or indifferent	It becomes more effective when linked to the immediate needs of citizens (such as damaged roads, dirty environment)
3	Answering citizen complaint	Feeling awkward when having to respond calmly	Afraid of offending citizens' feelings	Empathy is necessary: listen first before responding, and communicate information openly

Table 4. Post-Test Results

Questions	Percentage
Methods to ensure the message is understood by the community	84%
Actions to take when the audience is not paying attention	78%
Key preparations before speaking in public	84%
Ways to make the audience interested in the speech	80%

After the post-test was conducted, the training participants completed a reaction evaluation form. This reaction evaluation was carried out to assess the participants' responses and feelings toward the training they received. Reaction evaluation plays an important role in ensuring that the training is not only effective in terms of the knowledge delivered but also enjoyable for the participants.

Additionally, it serves as an opportunity for the training organizers to gather constructive feedback from the participants (Curado & Teixeira, 2014).

Table 5 summarizes the results of the participants' reaction evaluation. Average scores above four indicates a positive response to the training. The use of the role-play method in this training was considered helpful in enabling participants to understand effective public speaking. Additionally, participants suggested extending the duration of the role-play sessions and incorporating more diverse scenarios, so that they could have more opportunities to practice speaking in front of a group and receive feedback. Furthermore, participants recommended including real-life practice videos to strengthen the learning process.

Table 5. Training Evaluation Result

No	Question	Average Score (1–5)	Feedback Summary
1	The training material is aligned with my needs as a village official.	4.4	Majority of participants feel that the training content was relevant and helpful for their work.
2	Training instructor delivered the material clearly and in an easy-to-understand manner.	4.5	Material delivery was considered good, using simple and easily understood language.
3	I felt comfortable and engaged throughout the training sessions.	4.0	The training atmosphere was considered enjoyable, although some participants had not yet engaged in direct practice.
4	Role play helped me understand how to speak effectively in front of citizens.	4.5	The practice sessions were highly appreciated and considered genuinely helpful.

CONCLUSION

The public speaking training for Kalisidi Village Official, conducted through an experiential learning approach, has proven effective in enhancing their public communication capacity. This approach enables participants to learn through direct experience, critical reflection, and constructive feedback, making the learning process

more participatory, contextual, and sustainable. Evaluation results indicate a significant improvement in participants' understanding and skills related to fundamental public speaking techniques, such as preparation for public speaking, constructing clear and engaging messages, and maintaining audience focus and attention.

This capacity enhancement not only impacts the personal development of the village official but also strengthens the communication function within the context of village governance as a vital instrument in promoting citizen participation and improving the quality of public services. Therefore, this training can be categorized as part of a model for strengthening public communication capacity at the village level, which is relevant to be implemented in other local communities. The findings from this activity also emphasize the importance of training designs that are adaptive to participants' needs, including the necessity for longer allocated time for simulation sessions and the use of additional learning media such as representative public speaking practice videos. This training is expected to serve as a foundational step for developing a more inclusive, collaborative, and participatory village communication strategy, as well as supporting the realization of more effective and responsive village governance that meets the needs of the community.

To ensure the sustainability of excellent public service delivery, this activity will be followed by an evaluation as part of the program's continuation, with the sustainability program implemented through additional competency-based training fit with field needs. To reinforce sustainability, training participants will be expanded by including Karang Taruna to foster an inclusive and regenerative public communication ecosystem at the village level. Consequently, communication capacity will not only serve as an institutional asset but also evolve into a participatory culture instilled from an early stage.

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