Enhancing Self-Confidence and Reducing Public Speaking Anxiety among University Students in Owerri, Nigeria through Structured Training

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Abstract

Low self-confidence in public speaking remains a persistent challenge in higher education, particularly among university students in Owerri, Nigeria. This condition restricts students' active participation in academic and social contexts, including classroom discussions, oral presentations, and public event facilitation. This community engagement study aimed to examine the effectiveness of structured public speaking training in enhancing students' public speaking skills and self-confidence. A quantitative approach was employed using a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, involving 37 university students selected through purposive sampling. The training program was delivered through a structured sequence of theoretical instruction, simulations, guided practice, and systematic feedback. Data were collected using Likert-scale questionnaires and observation sheets and analyzed using paired-sample t-tests. The findings demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in students' overall public speaking skills following the intervention ($t = 5.12$, $p < 0.001$). Notable improvements were observed in performance confidence, speech fluency, content mastery, eye contact, body language, and voice control. These results indicate that structured, practice-oriented public speaking training effectively reduces communication anxiety and strengthens students' self-confidence. Pedagogically, this study recommends the integration of systematic public speaking training into higher education soft skills development and student empowerment programs.
Keywords: Public Speaking; Self-Confidence; University Students; Training; Communication Skills.

Abstrak

Meningkatkan Kepercayaan Diri dan Mengurangi Kecemasan Berbicara di Depan Umum pada Mahasiswa Universitas di Owerri, Nigeria melalui Pelatihan Terstruktur. *Rendahnya kepercayaan diri dalam berbicara di depan umum masih menjadi tantangan yang berkelanjutan dalam pendidikan tinggi, khususnya di kalangan mahasiswa universitas di Owerri, Nigeria. Kondisi ini membatasi partisipasi aktif mahasiswa dalam konteks akademik dan sosial, termasuk diskusi kelas, presentasi lisan, serta fasilitasi kegiatan publik. Kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji efektivitas pelatihan public speaking terstruktur dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara di depan umum dan kepercayaan diri mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain pra-eksperimental one-group pretest–posttest, yang melibatkan 37 mahasiswa yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Program pelatihan dilaksanakan melalui rangkaian kegiatan yang terstruktur, meliputi pembelajaran teoritis, simulasi, praktik terbimbing, dan umpan balik sistematis. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan kuesioner skala Likert dan lembar observasi, kemudian dianalisis dengan uji paired-sample t-test. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan secara statistik pada keterampilan public speaking mahasiswa setelah pelatihan (t = 5,12; p < 0,001). Peningkatan tersebut terlihat pada aspek kepercayaan diri penampilan, kelancaran berbicara, penguasaan materi, kontak mata, bahasa tubuh, dan pengendalian suara. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pelatihan public speaking berbasis praktik yang terstruktur efektif dalam mengurangi kecemasan komunikasi dan memperkuat kepercayaan diri mahasiswa. Secara pedagogis, kegiatan ini merekomendasikan integrasi pelatihan public speaking secara sistematis dalam program pengembangan soft skills dan pemberdayaan mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi.*
Kata kata kunci : *Public Speaking; Kepercayaan Diri; Mahasiswa; Pelatihan; Keterampilan Komunikasi.*

Introduction

Public speaking skills constitute one of the essential oral communication competencies for university students, as they significantly support academic success, personal development, and readiness to enter the professional world. In higher education settings, students are expected to articulate ideas clearly, logically, and confidently in various academic and social activities, including classroom presentations, scholarly discussions, organizational leadership, and community engagement programs. Research indicates that public speaking proficiency enhances students' ability to present academic content effectively and contributes to the development of communication and professional skills sought by employers, making it a vital component of higher education curricula (Rahmadhania et al., 2025). Moreover, mastery of public speaking has been linked to increased self-confidence and improved interpersonal communication, both of which are essential for successful participation in academic and future professional contexts (Sekar, 2025). Numerous studies further confirm that public speaking skills contribute significantly to the effectiveness of academic communication and students' career readiness (Rahmadhania et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, empirical evidence consistently shows that many university students continue to experience difficulties in speaking before an audience, particularly in terms of self-confidence. Low self-confidence in public speaking is commonly manifested through heightened communication anxiety, fear of making mistakes, unstable vocal delivery, and avoidance of public speaking situations (Bodie, 2020; Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2021; Ferreira Marinho et al., 2023). These conditions not only hinder students' oral performance but also negatively affect their academic participation and overall communication competence. Previous studies have demonstrated that self-confidence plays a significant role in public speaking ability, in which students with higher levels of self-confidence tend to communicate more effectively and persuasively (Nurmalasari et al., 2025; Indraswati et al., 2020).

Similar challenges were observed among students at a college in Owerri, Nigeria. Based on preliminary observations conducted during academic mentoring and student support activities, many students demonstrated relatively low levels of self-confidence when required to engage in public speaking roles, such as presenters, masters of ceremony (MCs), or speakers in formal and semi-formal academic forums. A number of students tended to avoid these roles, while those who participated frequently exhibited signs of nervousness, monotonous intonation, poorly structured speech delivery, limited eye contact, and minimal interaction with the audience. These situational conditions are consistent with empirical findings indicating that public speaking anxiety among university students is associated with avoidance behavior, reduced vocal expressiveness, weak organizational structure, and limited communicative engagement (Altun, 2023; García-Monge et al., 2023; Lin & Wu, 2024). Previous studies also suggest that such difficulties may hinder students' academic participation and impede the development of essential oral communication competencies required in higher education contexts (Russell & Topham, 2020). This situational analysis highlights the need for a targeted and context-sensitive public speaking intervention for students in Owerri.

The low level of students' self-confidence in public speaking is influenced by several interrelated factors, including limited practical speaking experience, the absence of systematic public speaking training, and psychological factors such as fear of evaluation and negative self-

perceptions of personal ability. Research indicates that insufficient opportunities for structured practice can exacerbate communication anxiety and hinder the development of oral communication competence (Feinberg & Aiello, 2021). In addition, cognitive and affective factors, such as fear of negative evaluation and low self-efficacy, have been empirically linked to increased speaking anxiety and avoidance behaviors in academic speaking tasks (Beatty et al., 2022; Özdemir, 2023). These findings suggest that effective public speaking interventions should address both pedagogical and psychological dimensions of communication development. In many cases, students possess adequate mastery of academic content but are unable to communicate it optimally due to limitations in confidence, delivery skills, and anxiety management. Ainayya and Marsofiyati (2025) further emphasize that self-confidence and communication skills are closely interrelated and jointly influence students' public speaking performance.

Public speaking training is therefore regarded as a strategic and practical solution to address these challenges. Training programs that are systematically designed and practice-oriented—covering vocal techniques, articulation, body language, anxiety management, and role simulations as speakers and MCs—have been shown to be effective in enhancing students' self-confidence and public speaking skills. Compared to lecture-based or theory-dominated communication instruction, practice-based training models provide students with repeated performance opportunities, immediate feedback, and gradual exposure to speaking situations, which are particularly beneficial for individuals experiencing communication anxiety. Several studies indicate that public speaking training integrating theoretical instruction with direct practice can significantly improve students' oral communication performance and confidence levels (Arif, 2025; Yumary, 2025).

Within the context of Community Service (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat/PkM), higher education institutions play a strategic role in developing students' capacities as members of both academic and social communities. The public speaking training program conducted for college students in Owerri, Nigeria represents a relevant and practical form of community service, as it directly responds to the oral communication challenges identified through situational analysis. This activity not only aims to enhance individual competencies but also to strengthen students' participation in academic, organizational, and broader social activities.

Based on this background, this article aims to describe efforts to enhance students' self-confidence in public speaking through a structured public speaking training program conducted in Owerri, Nigeria. The article presents the implementation process of the training, participants' public speaking skill development, and the impact of the program on improving students' self-confidence in performing roles as presenters and masters of ceremony (MCs). It is expected that the findings of this program may serve as a reference for the development of sustainable and context-sensitive oral communication training initiatives in higher education institutions, both in Nigeria and Indonesia.

Method

Program Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat (PkM) ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain pra-eksperimental berupa one-group pretest–posttest untuk mengevaluasi perubahan keterampilan public speaking dan kepercayaan diri mahasiswa

sebelum dan sesudah mengikuti pelatihan public speaking terstruktur. Pendekatan ini dipandang relevan dalam konteks PkM karena berfokus pada evaluasi hasil intervensi pada kelompok sasaran tertentu tanpa bertujuan menetapkan hubungan kausal. Peserta berjumlah 37 mahasiswa aktif dari berbagai program studi pada sebuah perguruan tinggi di Owerri, Nigeria, yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling dengan kriteria mahasiswa yang menunjukkan kecenderungan rendahnya kepercayaan diri dalam kegiatan berbicara di depan umum, baik sebagai pembicara maupun pembawa acara. Pelatihan diawali dengan pretest untuk mengidentifikasi kondisi awal peserta, dilanjutkan dengan pemberian materi yang mencakup konsep dasar public speaking, pengelolaan kecemasan berbicara, penguasaan vokal dan artikulasi, penggunaan bahasa tubuh, serta pengorganisasian dan penyampaian pesan. Proses pelatihan diperkuat melalui simulasi dan praktik langsung secara individual dan kelompok, disertai umpan balik terstruktur dari fasilitator. Setelah pelatihan selesai, posttest dilaksanakan untuk menilai perubahan keterampilan dan kepercayaan diri peserta. Instrumen pengumpulan data berupa kuesioner skala Likert dan lembar observasi keterampilan public speaking yang disusun berdasarkan indikator kepercayaan diri, kelancaran berbicara, penguasaan materi, kontak mata, ekspresi wajah dan bahasa tubuh, serta pengelolaan suara. Validitas instrumen ditetapkan melalui expert judgment oleh pakar bahasa dan komunikasi, sedangkan reliabilitas diuji menggunakan koefisien Cronbach's Alpha yang menunjukkan konsistensi internal yang memadai ($\alpha > 0,70$). Data dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif untuk menggambarkan kondisi sebelum dan sesudah pelatihan, serta uji t berpasangan untuk mengetahui signifikansi peningkatan yang terjadi. Aspek etika diperhatikan dengan memperoleh persetujuan partisipan secara sadar, menjamin kerahasiaan data, dan memastikan penggunaan data hanya untuk kepentingan akademik dan pengembangan program, dengan dukungan serta persetujuan dari institusi mitra meskipun tidak memerlukan persetujuan etik formal karena bersifat non-klinis dan berorientasi pada pengembangan keterampilan.

Result and Discussion

The public speaking training program was conducted on December 24–26, 2025, at a college in Owerri, Nigeria, and involved 37 student participants. Prior to the implementation of the training, a pretest was administered to assess participants' baseline public speaking skills. The pretest results indicated that most participants demonstrated low to moderate levels of public speaking competence. This condition was reflected in limited self-confidence, minimal eye contact with the audience, unstable vocal delivery, inadequate voice projection, weak speech organization, and insufficient anxiety control during public speaking performances.

These findings are consistent with the initial observations, which revealed that many students in Owerri experienced speaking anxiety when required to perform as speakers or masters of ceremony (MCs). Quantitatively, the number of students who demonstrated mastery across the assessed public speaking indicators was relatively low, as summarized in Table 1. Indicators such as audience interaction (35%), intonation and vocal expression (38%), and body language (41%) showed particularly low mastery, suggesting that affective and performative aspects of public speaking posed the greatest challenges for participants prior to the intervention.

No.	Public Speaking Skills	Performance Indicators	Participants Demonstrating Mastery (n)	Percentage
		Table 1. Participants' Public Speaking Skill Mastery Based on Pretest Result		
1	Speaking self-confidence	Willing to speak in public without excessive hesitation	18	49%
2	Articulation and voice clarity	Pronunciation relatively clear, but voice volume still unstable	17	46%
3	Content mastery	Presentation content still limited and lacking depth	21	57%
4	Speech organization	Flow of ideas not yet consistent	16	43%
5	Body language (gestures and posture)	Rigid gestures and lack of confident posture	15	41%
6	Intonation and vocal expression	Delivery tends to be monotonous	14	38%
7	Anxiety management	Nervousness still evident during speaking	16	43%
8	Audience interaction	Minimal eye contact and audience engagement	13	35%
9	Effective language use	Diction remains general and repetitive	19	51%
10	Convincing closure	Conclusion lacks strength and memorability	17	46%

The pretest results served as a baseline for designing and delivering the public speaking training materials. Following the completion of the training sessions over three structured meetings, posttest results revealed notable improvements across all assessed public speaking skill indicators. Students demonstrated increased confidence when speaking in public, which was evident in more open body posture, improved eye contact, clearer articulation, and more controlled vocal intonation.

In addition, participants showed enhanced ability to organize and deliver messages systematically, both during short presentations and role-play simulations as masters of ceremony (MCs). A comparison between pretest and posttest results indicates a substantial increase in the number of participants demonstrating mastery in each indicator, as presented in Table 2. The most pronounced improvement was observed in content mastery (from 57% to

86%) and effective language use (from 51% to 84%), while audience interaction, although improved, showed a relatively lower posttest percentage (65%) compared to other indicators.

Table 2. Participants' Public Speaking Skills Based on Posttest Results

No.	Public Speaking Skills	Performance Indicators	Participants Demonstrating Mastery (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Speaking self-confidence	Confident public appearance with stable eye contact	30	81
2	Articulation and voice clarity	Clear pronunciation with evenly projected volume	28	76
3	Content mastery	Coherent presentation content aligned with the topic	32	86
4	Speech organization	Systematic opening, body, and conclusion	29	78
5	Body language (gestures and posture)	Gestures support the message with upright posture	27	73
6	Intonation and vocal expression	Varied intonation without monotony	25	68
7	Anxiety management	Ability to control nervousness during performance	26	70
8	Audience interaction	Responsive and actively engaging the audience	24	65
9	Effective language use	Appropriate diction and communicative sentence construction	31	84
10	Convincing closure	Strong and memorable conclusion	28	76

The improvement in students' public speaking skills was supported by intensive practice and simulation activities conducted in small breakout groups. During these sessions, participants actively engaged in speaking exercises, peer interaction, and facilitator-guided feedback, which enabled a more focused and supportive learning environment.
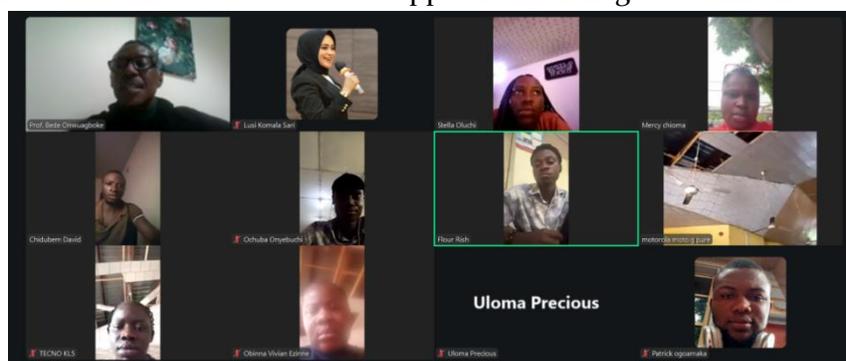
Figure 1. Public speaking practice session in a breakout room, where students practiced delivering short presentations and received facilitator feedback during the training program in Owerri, Nigeria

Further statistical analysis using a paired-samples t-test confirmed that the observed improvements in students' public speaking skills after the training program were statistically significant, indicating that the intervention had a meaningful effect on participants' performance. This finding provides quantitative support for the descriptive improvements observed across all public speaking indicators.

The differential levels of improvement across indicators suggest that the training program was particularly effective in enhancing cognitive and technical aspects of public speaking, such as content mastery and message organization. These skills were explicitly emphasized during the training through structured material delivery, guided practice, and facilitator feedback, which likely contributed to their higher rates of improvement. Conversely, indicators related to audience interaction and vocal expressiveness showed comparatively lower gains, which may be attributed to their stronger association with affective factors such as anxiety, self-awareness, and prior speaking experience. Developing audience engagement skills often requires longer-term exposure and repeated real-life speaking opportunities beyond short-term training interventions.

Importantly, the observed improvements were not limited to technical speaking skills but also extended to the affective domain, particularly students' self-confidence. Throughout the training process, participants gradually developed the ability to manage public speaking anxiety through repeated practice, simulations, and constructive feedback. This finding supports the view that public speaking competence can be cultivated through experiential learning and habituation rather than being solely determined by innate talent.

The results of this program align with previous empirical studies demonstrating that practice-based public speaking training contributes significantly to the enhancement of students' communication competence and self-confidence. Muchlis and Pujianto (2024) found that structured public speaking training improves students' ability to convey ideas systematically while strengthening their confidence in public speaking contexts. Similarly, Nugroho et al. (2025) reported that simulation-based public speaking training had a significant effect on reducing anxiety and enhancing self-confidence among university students. Muhammad et al. (2025) further confirmed that hands-on practice and role-play effectively reduce communication apprehension associated with public speaking.

These findings are consistent with international research highlighting the importance of experiential and practice-oriented approaches in public speaking instruction. McNatt (2019) demonstrated that service-learning-based public speaking activities significantly enhance students' self-efficacy, performance quality, and confidence, particularly among learners who initially exhibit high levels of speaking anxiety. Likewise, Arif (2025) reported that interactive, practice-based public speaking training resulted in measurable improvements in students' confidence and delivery skills in higher education contexts. Community service-based interventions also show similar outcomes, as evidenced by Riesky et al. (2025), who found that guided public speaking training positively influenced students' self-perception and readiness to speak in public forums.

Furthermore, empirical studies consistently confirm the close relationship between self-confidence and public speaking competence. Nurmalasari et al. (2023) found that students with higher self-confidence demonstrate significantly better public speaking performance, while

Asriani et al. (2025) and Utari et al. (2023) reported that self-confidence is a strong predictor of students' public speaking skills. Additional studies emphasize that structured assistance and repeated practice play a crucial role in developing communication confidence, even in community-based and non-formal learning settings (Tarigan et al., 2022; Liandi et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings reinforce the conclusion that systematic, practice-oriented public speaking training is an effective strategy for enhancing both technical communication skills and students' affective readiness to engage confidently with an audience.

Within the context of community service in higher education, these findings indicate that practice- and simulation-oriented public speaking training constitutes an effective and relevant intervention for addressing students' low self-confidence in public speaking. For students in Owerri, Nigeria, the program provided not only technical speaking skills but also psychological readiness to participate more actively in academic, organizational, and social activities. Therefore, integrating public speaking training into institutional soft skills development programs is recommended as a sustainable strategy to enhance students' communication competence and self-confidence in higher education settings.

Conclusion

Secara keseluruhan, program pelatihan public speaking yang dilaksanakan dalam kegiatan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat ini terbukti memberikan kontribusi positif terhadap peningkatan keterampilan public speaking dan kepercayaan diri mahasiswa, yang tercermin dari perbaikan pada aspek keberanian berbicara, kelancaran, penguasaan materi, kontak mata, bahasa tubuh, serta pengelolaan suara. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kompetensi public speaking bukan semata-mata kemampuan bawaan, melainkan keterampilan yang dapat dikembangkan secara sistematis melalui pembiasaan, praktik berulang, dan umpan balik konstruktif, sehingga relevan untuk mendukung pengembangan soft skills mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi. Selain berdampak pada aspek teknis komunikasi lisan, pelatihan ini juga memperkuat kesiapan afektif mahasiswa dalam mengelola kecemasan dan membangun rasa percaya diri dalam berbagai konteks akademik dan organisasi. Dengan demikian, program ini berpotensi untuk dikembangkan secara berkelanjutan melalui integrasi ke dalam kegiatan ko-kurikuler dan ekstra-kurikuler di institusi mitra, sekaligus menjadi rujukan awal bagi pelaksanaan program sejenis di masa mendatang dengan desain yang lebih kuat, cakupan peserta yang lebih luas, dan pengkajian dampak jangka panjang.

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