Communication skill: A Challenge for Vocational High School Students in the 21st century

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Abstract

For vocational high school graduates to be accepted in business and industry, increasing the ability to use international languages, one of which is English is one of the main goals. Thus, the purpose of this community service is to train the students in understanding presentations appropriately. While the particular objectives are: 1) Improve the knowledge of strategies of writing and presentations in English well; 2) Enrich English vocabulary; 3) Improve writing and speaking skill; 4) Increase self-confidence, and 5) Prepare them to become professional graduates in terms of mastering English. There are thirty students of 12th grade of SMKN 56 North Jakarta participating in this training. The training was conducted within 12 hours, which was divided into three sessions for two days. At each meeting, students were monitored and practiced under the trainers' guidance. The trainers also showed two examples of good presentations on YouTube. The training techniques are the lecture, discussion, brainstorming, and demonstration / direct practice that train students to understand every step by step in presentation and writing. The results show that students' self-confidence developed, and vocabulary mastery, writing, and presentation skills increased as well. Out of 30 students, 5 participants delivered a presentation without reading the text. Although the results were not significant, the students had active participation in the discussion and practiced in groups and gave the speech in public. The evaluation result was 38.79 with a 1-4 scale with an excellent category. It is concluded that this training is highly needed and useful for vocational students.

Keywords: communication skill, vocational high school, public speaking.

INTRODUCTION

To master English effectively and comprehensively, each must have four skills, namely speaking and writing as productive skills and listening and reading as receptive skills. In addition to these four skills, mastery of three components of language, namely grammatical structure, pronunciation, and vocabulary is also very essential to improve language skills. However, having those skills are not enough to face globalization, in this 21st century, students are required to master four other skills known as 4C's skills, namely critical thinking, collaboration, communication and creativity (National Education Association, NEA.). In terms of communication skill as a part of public speaking competence, it plays a vital role in individual success in many aspects. Research revealed

that acquiring good communication skills enabled students to obtain good grades in other courses (Dwyer, Carlson, & Kahre, 2002), and contributed a positive impact on the way students perceived their 'self-esteem', 'behavioral competence', and their 'enthusiasm to communicate' (S. Morreale, Hackman, & Neer, 1995, 1998).

In a few decades, even though English becomes the priority of foreign language in education as well as in society, which is one of the subjects in the national exam in Indonesia. The contact hour is less limited due to many other subjects taught at school. The teachers do not provide sufficient English exposure, which makes students become passive learners. One of the obstacles and problems faced by students and graduates of Vocational High School is the lack of communication skill in English, which is the central aspect in this era of globalization so as to compete internationally. Thus, the inability to communicate in English will result in low recruitment from the world of industry and business. The partner in community service is SMKN 56. SMKN 56 was established on 2 July 1985, which focuses on technology and Engineering and Information and Communication Technology. At this moment the school has eight programs include 1) machine, 2) light vehicle (automotive), 3) Electricity Installation, 4) architecture, 5) Multi-Media, 6) Mechatronics, 7) automotive electronic (*Outotronic*), and 8) computer network engineering. This school is one of the excellent vocational schools in Jakarta in term of implementing learning and students' achievement, which has already applied *Teaching Factory* and *Technopark* as learning models to bridge students with business and industry. Aside from these achievements, the school has several problems related to English language skills, particularly in speaking ability, which hamper students. To succeed in academic, personal and professional, competence in oral communication is a prerequisite for these three things (S. P. Morreale & Pearson, 2008).

Under these circumstances, the need for training students to have English competence is highly imperative. (S. P. Morreale, Worley, & Hugenberg, 2010) highlighted that acquiring such speaking proficiency is predominantly learning objective connected to communication course. Thus, this community service aims to improve students' communication skill in terms of English language mastery.

ISSUES

Based on the interview with the principal, some problems faced by the students and graduates of this vocational high school are as follows:

1. The need for industry and business to recruit professional graduates who are not only competent in their expertise but also in the ability to communicate in English

2. The English national exam grade is still low, which is an average of 54.36 in 2017

3. Speaking skill is not one of the critical aspects of the learning process. It mostly emphasized on reading comprehension and multiple choice, which make students become passive learners.

4. Out of 25 students who were offered jobs in German companies in 2018, only 15 passed the interview due to their inability to communicate in English.

It is necessary to provide training and guidance intensively especially for the 12th grade to overcome such problems. The training focuses on integrated and comprehensive English-language training on all English language skills to improve their communication skill.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

These outreach activities are carried out for two days, namely on Friday, 11 January 2019 and on Wednesday, 16 January 2019 at SMKN 56. The school is located at Jalan Raya Pluit Timur No 1, RT 10 RW 9, Pluit Penjaringan, Jakarta Utara 14450. The implementation of this community service was conducted in three sessions where each session lasted for 4 hours. Thirty participants of class 12 majoring in multimedia engineering, consisted of seven female students and twenty-three male students, took part in this training. This class was selected to take part in the training because they are class 12, which are going to graduate this year. That's why; this English training is highly needed to prepare them to get jobs.

Some training materials include:

1. How to be a good public speaker

2. 16 Presentation ideas and power point examples

3. Basic techniques for delivering speech include: Stage fright; Have good posture; Facial expression; Movement and gesture; Eye contact; Speak with enthusiasm; Vary your speaking rate; and Practice.

4. Presentation techniques comprise of the opening statement, overview, useful language and speech for communication.

5. Examples of Public Figure Speech

   a. Mark Zuckerberg "*Harvard commencement speech*."

b. Priyanka Chopra "*Full Power of Women Speech*,"

To respond to the problems stated above, providing training for the students to improve their verbal skill, specifically, is very imperative. During the training of public speaking, four techniques applied are as follows:

1) Lecture: this technique is carried out to provide basic body knowledge of presentations and other things related to public speaking. In this part, the trainers explained the importance of English as one of the imperative international languages and communication skill. The trainers also gave details about the basic presentation techniques and some practical ways to deliver the speech.

2) Brainstorming and discussion: the trainer elicits some questions related to public speaking and discusses some examples of presentations through YouTube with the participants. They also discuss common mistakes that occur in the presentation by comparing some public figure speeches. Two examples of YouTube are the presentation of Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook while giving a graduation speech at Harvard University. The event was called "Harvard Commencement Speech." The second one is Priyanka Chopra's speech entitled "Full Power of Women Speech," where she was appointed as the ambassador of the UNICEF (the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) a UN organization that provides humanitarian assistance and long-term welfare development to children and their mothers in developing countries. The two public figures above are chosen based on their achievements and contributions given to the community in the world. Also, students will be able to distinguish between the two public figures based on prior knowledge, such as movement and gesture, eye contact, facial expression, posture, intonation, speaking rate, the language used, and others. Participants were encouraged to find out the differences and similarities between the two famous people since both of them come from different countries. Mark is from the United States where English is his first language, while Priyanka comes from India where English is the second language. In this session, the participants discussed the two public figures guided by the coach.

3) Mentoring: the trainer assisted participants to write draft presentations that they have made during activities. The trainer also did the correction before the participants delivered the speech

4) Demonstration or direct practice is a technique to train participants to understand and practice speaking and writing skills by presenting exciting and up to date topics. Participants were instructed to implement several effective ways to improve their presentation skill. The students practiced some typical examples of expressions individually, in pairs or group work. In this technique, participants were trained to write speeches whose titles are in accordance with their respective experiences. Each participant was required to practice first in each group before delivering the speech in public. They had about 15 minutes to prepare and 5 minutes to do the presentation. After all of them delivered the speech, the trainer gave feedback to each participant and gave praise for those who had the best performances.

The monitoring and evaluation activities are very much needed to ensure the success and effectiveness of public speaking training for students. It functions as feedback for the trainers for the next community service activities. From the questionnaire distributed, the results of the average index were 38.79 with a 1-4 scale, which means an excellent category. This category identifies that this training is beneficial in providing insight, knowledge, and training for vocational students who are needed to communicate and in the future work or their life.

DISCUSSION

The results of community service activities or community partnership programs (PKM) in broad outline include several components, namely:

1. Achievement of community service goals and material targets

   The implementation of community service activities is carried out the days adjusted to the ongoing subjects. The subjects that can be replaced into training presentations are practical subjects they usually do in the computer room. Achievement of training objectives regarding the activities and materials provided for the overall presentation training have been achieved and delivered according to the time of implementation

2. Completion of the number of trainees

   For the components of training participants' achievements, as planned previously, a maximum of 30 participants from class XII majoring in multimedia engineering, meet the target. The implementation went smoothly for two days where all 30 students attended. But on the second day, 29 students participated, because one

student got sick, so he could not take part in the activity, which was the core activity of writing and presentation training.

3. The enthusiasm of the participants in taking part actively in discussion and activity.

    The trainees were somewhat enthusiastic to ask questions and get involved in each activity. Even in the last session, students used their breaks to stay in class and practice presentations. Each session was conducted with Q & A and discussion so as not to bore students and also interspersed with icebreaker activities and games to improve their English language skills. The game is "Find Someone Who," which this game trains students to convert positive sentences into questions by asking friends. Students are asked to stand up and go around to find participants who are in accordance with the questions listed on the form. In this activity, students are more relaxed and not ashamed to ask their classmates. The second game is "getting to know you" where students are asked to find as much information as possible about their friends' activities, hobbies, and strange habits. In this activity, students are trained to be able to develop vocabulary and make reports from the results of their interviews with friends.

4. Achievement of participants' ability to understand the material

    The ability of participants to write the draft of the presentation is quite good, and even some of them use pictures or draw pictures as suggested by the trainer to start the presentation. Because their majors are multimedia, most of them can draw well; even some of them look professional for the vocational school students. Since time was limited, students were unable to prepare the presentation perfectly, so that only 5 participants delivered speeches without looking at the text, while the others were still reading the text (*reading aloud*). Of the 30 students, only one was not present due to illness. But overall the ability of students is quite good, which can be proven from the presentation draft. What need to be developed is the students' public speaking abilities. For example: how to deliver a speech or do the presentation without reading texts all the time; how to reduce their nervousness; how to vary their voice or express their emotion accordingly based on sentences on the text; how to manage eye contact; and others which are basic techniques in delivering speeches.

For English speaking skill, students must practice a lot in class and outside of the class. As for lack of exposure from the school, which only focuses on reading ability and

answering questions, the students have limited vocabulary. Without developing communication skill and writing skill, they will just become passive learners. It is expected that because of the training of this presentation, students will have more opportunity to practice speaking both in class and outside the classroom, which has an impact on the development of their language skills.

The supporting and inhibiting factors are as follows:

a. Supporting factors are great enthusiasm of the participants in participating in training activities with 99% attendance and active role in asking questions, as well as being involved in discussions both in group discussions or class discussions so that the implementation goes well and smoothly. In addition, support from the school, principals and homeroom teacher in these training activities and the great appreciation from them is precious for us as trainers.

b. The inhibiting factor is their lack of English language skills due to the lack of exposure from the school in the learning process. In addition, time is also still insufficient in training students' writing and speaking skills.

Giving feedback after students do the presentation is necessary to improve their speaking skill. The feedback includes their articulation, pronunciation, and the way they present the topic related to the knowledge of public speaking. Thus, the students are aware of their weaknesses and are encouraged to practice more. The previous study found out that feedback and goal setting strategy enables students to improve their speaking abilities (De Grez, Valcke, & Roozen, 2009). Having fear, nervousness or anxiety when talking in public is a natural process. It is undeniable that everyone must experience this feeling. To reduce such feeling, they need to figure out their strengths and weaknesses as to reinforcing the strengths and limiting the weaknesses. (LeFebvre, Leah, E, & Mike, 2018) emphasized, instead of using cognitive modification or deep breathing exercises, which prove less effective. Recalling and sharing the content of presentation with an audience and utilizing notes will improve students' communication competence effectively.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that all components are carried out properly according to the plan, even though there are obstacles and problems faced by the facilitator regarding the abilities of the participants. Specifically, the results of community service activities are:

a. Increasing students' knowledge and understanding in writing presentation drafts and how to present topics correctly, well and interestingly.

b. Improve the skills of students in writing and presenting general topics in English.

c. Improve their public speaking skills so that they can become public speakers someday and be able to communicate well and fluently.

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