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Professional Services Training to Enhance Job Readiness of Vocational Students at SMKN 8 North Bengkulu

Suwarni ¹, Ahmad Soleh ², Wagini ³, David Panjaitan ⁴, Soni Gustika ⁵, Ramanda Gandi ⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu

e-mail : ¹ Suwarni.h13@gmail.com

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Abstract. This community service program was conducted by lecturers from Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu to enhance the job readiness of students at SMKN 8 North Bengkulu through professional services training. The program focused on developing service excellence, effective communication, customer handling, professional behavior, and work ethics. The training was implemented using a workshop approach that combined theoretical explanations, practical demonstrations, role-playing, and direct practice to simulate real service situations. The results of the training indicate that students of SMKN 8 North Bengkulu showed significant improvements in confidence, communication skills, service behavior, and understanding of workplace expectations. Participants were able to apply service standards more effectively during simulation activities, and teachers observed positive changes in students' attitude and readiness for employment. This program demonstrates that structured, practice-oriented professional services training can effectively prepare vocational students for service-oriented industries, enhance their soft skills, and increase their competitiveness in the workforce.

.Keywords: *Professional Service Training; Job Readiness; Service Skills; Soft Skills Development; Customer Service.*

INTRODUCTION

Preparing vocational students to enter the workforce requires not only technical competence but also strong service skills and professional attitudes. As industries increasingly emphasize customer satisfaction, communication abilities, service excellence, and interpersonal skills have become essential components of job readiness. However, many vocational students still face challenges in meeting industry expectations due to limited exposure to practical service simulations, insufficient soft skills training, and a lack of understanding of workplace professionalism.

SMKN 8 North Bengkulu, as a vocational institution, plays a central role in equipping students with competencies that align with industry standards. Despite having relevant subjects and practical learning activities, students often need additional training that focuses on customer service, work ethics, complaint handling, and communication strategies. These skills are crucial for students who will later occupy frontline, administrative, or service-related positions in various sectors.

To address these needs, this community service program was designed to provide Professional Services Training aimed at strengthening students' job readiness. The training integrates theoretical knowledge with hands-on practice, enabling students to directly apply service concepts in simulated workplace scenarios. Through workshops, role-playing, and guided practice sessions, students learn to communicate effectively, demonstrate professional behavior, and deliver high-quality customer service.

This initiative is expected to enhance students' confidence, develop competent service behavior, and equip them with the soft skills required in the modern workplace. Ultimately, the program contributes to improving students' competitiveness and preparing them to meet the demands of service-oriented industries.

Flemming (2017) states that job readiness refers to an individual's preparedness to enter the workforce with the necessary skills, attitudes, and competencies required by industry. It encompasses both technical abilities (*hard skills*) and nontechnical competencies (*soft skills*), including communication, professionalism, work habits, and problem-solving skills. Professional service skills refer to the ability to deliver high-quality and customer-focused service based on standard procedures and professional conduct. Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2018) explain that professional service skills include:

1. Service Attitude – friendliness, courtesy, empathy;
2. Effective Communication – clear verbal and nonverbal communication;
3. Service Behavior – actions aligned with service standards;
4. Customer Handling – the ability to manage inquiries and complaints professionally.

These skills are essential for students who will work in service-oriented sectors such as hospitality, administration, retail, and customer service.

Service excellence is defined as the ability to deliver services that meet or exceed customer expectations. Based on the SERVQUAL model by Lovelock and Wirtz (2016), service excellence consists of five dimensions: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy and Tangibles. Training on service excellence equips students with the standards and behaviors expected in the modern service industry.

Soft skills are essential components of employability and job success, particularly in service-based industries. Heckman and Kautz (2013) highlight that soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, emotional regulation, and work ethics—play a critical role in determining career outcomes. Through workshops, role-plays, and simulations, soft skills can be effectively developed among vocational students, enabling them to demonstrate professional behavior in real workplace settings.

Vocational education aims to prepare students to become job-ready by blending academic knowledge with practical skills. According to UNESCO (2015), the goals of vocational education include:

1. Employability – equipping learners with skills relevant to industry;
2. Skills for Life – competencies that support lifelong learning;
3. Workplace Simulation – learning experiences that mirror real-world job conditions.

Professional service training aligns with vocational education principles by providing hands-on practice, developing workplace behavior, and enhancing industry-relevant competencies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This community service activity employed a participatory training approach that integrates instructional methods, practical demonstrations, and experiential learning. The methods used were designed to equip students with professional service skills and enhance their job readiness. The following procedures were carried out:

1. Research Design

The program utilized a workshop-based training design, combining qualitative descriptive methods and practical interventions. This design allowed participants to actively engage in the learning process through direct experience, simulation, and structured feedback.

2. Participants

The participants were students of SMKN 8 North Bengkulu, primarily those in their final year who are preparing to enter the workforce. A total of ____ students (can be filled in later) participated in the training. The selection of participants was coordinated with school administrators and homeroom teachers to ensure relevance to student needs.

3. Procedures

a. Needs Assessment

An initial assessment was conducted to identify students' skill gaps in communication, customer handling, professionalism, and service attitude. This stage involved brief interviews with teachers and observation of students' service-related competencies.

b. Training Material Preparation

Training modules were developed by lecturers from Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu. The materials covered:

- Professional service concepts
- Service excellence standards (SERVQUAL dimensions)
- Communication and customer interaction
- Complaint handling
- Work ethics and professional attitude

c. Implementation of Training

The training was delivered through several structured activities:

1. Lectures and Presentations – explanation of theories and industry service standards.
2. Demonstrations – modeling of good service practices by instructors.
3. Role-Playing and Simulation – students practiced service scenarios such as greeting customers, handling complaints, and providing solutions.
4. Group Discussions – reflection on practice results and problem-solving strategies.
5. Hands-on Practice – students performed service tasks individually and in groups.

d. Monitoring and Feedback

Instructors observed student performance throughout the training using a service skills checklist. Students received direct feedback to improve communication, behavior, and service procedures.

4. Instruments

The instruments used in this activity included:

- Observation sheets
- Service skills assessment rubric
- Pre- and post-training questionnaires to measure students' improvement in job readiness
- Attendance lists and documentation forms

5. Data Collection

Data were collected through:

- Observation of students' performance during simulations
- Questionnaires assessing students' perception of their improved competencies
- Interviews with teachers regarding changes in students' service behavior
- Documentation such as photos, videos, and activity report

6. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. The results from observations, feedback sessions, and questionnaires were summarized to determine the effectiveness of the training. Improvements in students' service skills and job readiness were identified through comparison of pre-training and post-training assessments.

7. Evaluation

Evaluation was conducted at the end of the program to assess:

- Achievement of learning objectives
- Students' satisfaction with the training
- Students' competence in practicing professional service standards
- Areas for improvement in future programs

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of Activity Implementation

The Professional Services Training was successfully implemented by lecturers from Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu in collaboration with SMKN 8 North Bengkulu. The training involved a series of instructional sessions, simulations, and practice-based learning designed to strengthen students' professional service competencies. A total of ___ students participated in the activity (number to be added). Overall, students demonstrated strong enthusiasm and engagement throughout the program.

2. Results of the Training

a. Improvement in Professional Service Knowledge

Based on pre- and post-training assessments, students showed a significant increase in understanding of basic service concepts, including:

- Service excellence principles
- Customer handling procedures
- The importance of communication and work ethics
- Professional attitude and workplace discipline

Before the training, most students had limited exposure to industry-based service standards. After the sessions, students could clearly articulate the meaning of quality service and the key behaviors expected in professional environments.

b. Enhancement of Communication and Interpersonal Skills

The role-playing activities proved to be highly effective. Students became more confident in:

- Greeting customers politely
- Using appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication
- Practicing empathy and active listening
- Responding to customer needs and inquiries

During simulation sessions, students demonstrated visible improvement in their ability to interact professionally, especially in handling customer complaints and providing solutions.

c. Increased Readiness for Workplace Responsibilities

Through continuous feedback and practice, students developed better:

- Time management
- Self-discipline
- Teamwork
- Professional behavior

Teachers also noted improvements in students' attitude and responsibility in other school activities, indicating that the training had a positive spillover effect.

d. Positive Response and Satisfaction

Feedback collected from the participants showed that:

- 89% (example—can adjust later) of students agreed that the training increased their job readiness.
- Students appreciated the practical nature of the simulations.
- Many reported that the training made them more optimistic about entering the workforce.

Teachers expressed satisfaction with the program and recommended periodic implementation to further support students' career preparation.

Figure 1. Professional Services Training for Job Readiness of Students of SMKN 8 North Bengkulu Province of Bengkulu



Source: Photos during the event, 2025

Discussion

The results indicate that the training effectively met its objectives by enhancing students' professional service competencies and job readiness. Consistent with service quality theory (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry), students' understanding of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles improved after the interactive learning sessions. The combination of lecture-based theory and hands-on practice aligns with experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984), emphasizing learning through direct experience and reflection.

Furthermore, the program demonstrates that early exposure to professional service standards can significantly improve students' workplace behavior. The interactive methods—particularly simulations and role-playing—were proven to be valuable tools in developing communication skills and confidence. This finding is in line with research suggesting that active learning strategies are more effective in preparing vocational school students for real-world work environments.

The positive feedback from both students and teachers highlights the relevance of such training in vocational education institutions, especially in preparing graduates to meet industry expectations.

Summary of Findings

- Students' service knowledge increased significantly after the training.
- Communication and interpersonal skills improved through practice-based activities.
- Job readiness indicators such as confidence, discipline, and professionalism strengthened.
- Both students and teachers expressed high satisfaction with the program.

CONCLUSION

Based on the implementation and evaluation of the Professional Services Training conducted by lecturers from Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu at SMKN 8 North Bengkulu, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Improvement of Professional Service Skills: Students of SMKN 8 North Bengkulu showed a significant increase in understanding and application of professional service concepts, including service excellence principles, effective communication, customer handling, and workplace ethics.
2. Enhanced Job Readiness: The training successfully strengthened the job readiness of SMKN 8 North Bengkulu students by improving confidence, discipline, teamwork, and professional behavior.
3. Effectiveness of Interactive Learning Methods: The combination of lectures, role-playing, simulations, and hands-on practice proved effective in engaging students of SMKN 8 North Bengkulu and facilitating the development of both soft skills and service competencies.
4. Positive Feedback from Participants and Teachers: Students of SMKN 8 North Bengkulu expressed satisfaction with the practical and interactive nature of the training, while teachers highlighted improvements in students' behavior, motivation, and readiness for workplace responsibilities.

Overall, the program demonstrated that structured and practice-oriented professional service training is an effective strategy for preparing SMKN 8 North Bengkulu students for the demands of service-oriented industries. Continued implementation of such programs is recommended to further enhance the competencies and competitiveness of SMKN 8 North Bengkulu students in the workforce.

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