

Strategies For Strengthening New Student Communication In The Campus Environment Through Assertive Communication Training

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ABSTRACT

Background: New students frequently encounter communication challenges as they adjust to the campus environment, which can affect their learning process and social interactions. Assertive communication training is one effective strategy to enhance students' communication skills. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of assertive communication training in improving the communication skills of new students within the campus setting. Methods: The study was conducted by providing an assertive communication orientation to 175 nursing students. Data were collected using pretest and posttest assessments to measure changes in students' knowledge of assertive communication. Results: The pretest results showed that 35 students (25%) had low knowledge, and only 15 students (8.5%) demonstrated high knowledge of assertive communication. After the training, none of the students remained in the low knowledge category; 88 students (50.3%) had high knowledge, and 87 students (49.7%) had moderate knowledge. Conclusion: Assertive communication training is effective in enhancing the knowledge and communication skills of new students. These findings can serve as a basis for developing soft skills training programs to support students' adaptation to the higher education environment.

Keywords: assertive communication, new students, campus adaptation

INTRODUCTION

New university students often face substantial challenges in adapting to the campus environment, which tends to be more complex and diverse than their previous school settings. The transition from senior high school to higher education requires adequate interpersonal communication skills to build social relationships that support academic activities (Hastuti, Wulandari, & Ramadhani, 2022). Inability to communicate effectively can trigger feelings of isolation, low self-confidence, and difficulties in actively participating in the campus environment (Nurhidayah & Siregar, 2021). This situation may lead to reduced learning motivation and poor academic achievement among new students (Sari & Yuliana, 2021). Therefore, strategic interventions are needed to strengthen communication skills from the earliest stages of student orientation.

One relevant strategy to enhance students' communication capacity is assertive communication training. Assertive communication enables individuals to express their thoughts and feelings honestly while respecting the rights of others (Wicaksono & Kurniawan, 2020). Previous studies have shown that assertive communication training is effective in improving self-confidence and reducing social anxiety among students (Rahayu, Nugroho, & Utami, 2020). Students with assertive communication skills tend to be more active in classroom discussions and organizational activities (Putra & Rahmawati, 2021). Thus, strengthening assertive communication has become an urgent need to support the social adaptation of new students.

Several higher education institutions in Indonesia have begun implementing soft-skill enhancement programs; however, only a few explicitly focus on assertive communication (Anggraini, Astuti, & Hidayat, 2021). Most communication training programs emphasize public speaking or rhetorical skills, without sufficiently addressing interpersonal assertiveness (Hakim & Fitria, 2021). In fact, assertive communication has been shown to contribute positively to students' psychological well-being, such as reducing stress and increasing life satisfaction (Susanti, Purnama, & Rahmawati, 2021). Students trained in assertive communication are also better able to cope adaptively with social pressures in the campus environment (Rahmawati & Nugraheni, 2022). It is therefore necessary to design structured and continuous training programs to cultivate assertive communication skills among new students.

This community engagement activity aims to design and implement assertive communication training for new students as a strategy to strengthen their social adaptation in the campus environment. The training is expected to help new students build self-confidence in interacting with peers and lecturers (Dewi & Kartika, 2022). Furthermore, the outcomes of this training may serve as the basis for developing an applicable assertive communication training module tailored to the context of Indonesian students (Fadhillah & Rachmawati, 2021). In this way, a conducive academic climate can be fostered, supporting optimal student self-development (Lestari & Fitriani, 2022). Strengthening student communication through assertive communication training is expected to become a concrete contribution of community engagement in the field of higher education.

METHOD

The approach used in this community engagement program was health education. This approach aims to provide education in order to improve community knowledge. In this program, educational materials were delivered to students of the Undergraduate Nursing Study Program at the Faculty of Health Sciences, Universitas Kusuma Husada Surakarta. New students were prioritized as participants

because they were experiencing campus life and interactions for the first time. It was expected that new students would develop assertive communication skills that enable them to interact and socialize effectively in the campus environment.

The implementation stages included registration, followed by completion of a pre-test questionnaire, an ice-breaking session to focus students' attention, and the delivery of educational material using a lecture method. PowerPoint slides and tutorial videos were used as media. The facilitator delivered educational content covering the theoretical concept of assertive communication, the objectives of assertive communication, strategies to enhance assertive communication skills, and strategies for successfully applying assertive communication among students. After receiving the material, students practiced assertive communication strategies through small-group role-play activities facilitated directly by lecturers and senior students who had already applied assertive communication in their daily interactions on campus. At the end of the session, a discussion and question-and-answer segment was conducted, followed by a post-test. Evaluation of this community engagement activity was carried out by measuring the level of knowledge of first-year nursing students using pre-test and post-test questionnaires. The data obtained were analyzed statistically to assess changes in knowledge using a paired t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assertive communication education and role-play were delivered to 175 first-year undergraduate nursing students. The pre-test results showed that 35 students (25%) had low levels of knowledge and did not understand the definition, benefits, and objectives of assertive communication, while 15 students (8.5%) had high levels of knowledge. The post-test results indicated an increase in students' knowledge regarding assertive communication. After the training, no students remained in the low-knowledge category; 88 students (50.3%) achieved high knowledge, and 87 students (49.7%) were in the moderate knowledge category. The distribution of pre-test and post-test results is illustrated in Figure 1.

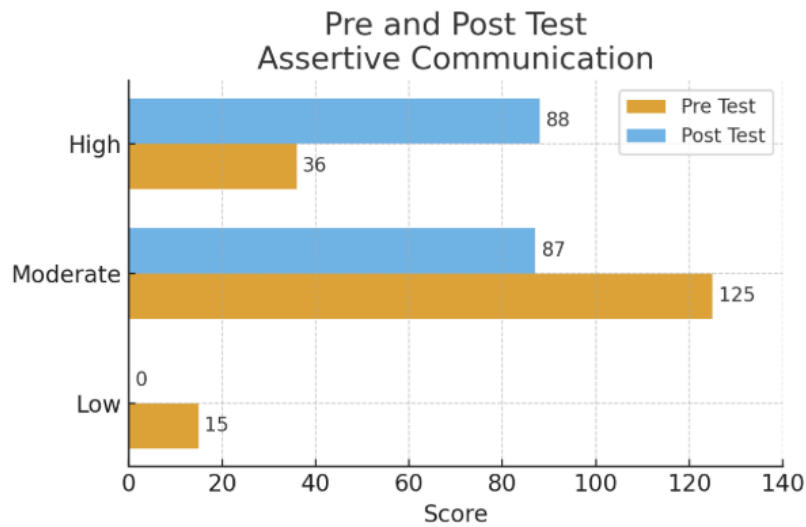


Figure 1. Pre and Post Test Assertive Communication

These findings indicate that assertive communication training successfully improved new students' understanding of the concept of assertive communication. Prior to the training, most students did not comprehend the definition, benefits, and objectives of assertive communication (Rahayu & Hartono, 2020; Dewi et al., 2021). This is consistent with previous studies reporting that new students frequently experience communication barriers (Yuliana & Putra, 2020). Limited basic understanding may hinder students' social adaptation on campus (Hastuti & Prabowo, 2021). Consequently, training strategies are essential to provide adequate foundational knowledge from the outset (Anggraini et al., 2022).

The systematic implementation of assertive communication training proved effective in increasing the proportion of students with high knowledge from 8.5% to 50.3% (Rahmawati & Sari, 2020). This improvement demonstrates the success of interactive orientation methods in facilitating understanding of assertive concepts (Kurniawan et al., 2021). Other studies similarly show that training employing group discussions can strengthen interpersonal communication skills (Putri & Lestari, 2021). This is important because students with good communication skills tend to develop positive social relationships (Susanti et al., 2020). Thus, assertive communication training contributes to the development of new students' soft skills (Hidayati & Nugroho, 2022).

The significant changes in post-test scores further confirm the short-term effectiveness of the training program. The absence of students in the low-knowledge category after the training suggests relatively uniform mastery of the material (Pratiwi & Hapsari, 2021). Training strategies that incorporate practical components and communication simulations support the internalization of skills (Putra et al.,

2022). A well-structured training program is therefore a key factor in the success of learning activities (Widodo & Arifin, 2023). These findings reinforce previous research emphasizing the importance of soft-skill training for new students (Syafitri & Dewi, 2022).

In addition to increasing knowledge, assertive communication training may enhance students' self-confidence (Lestari et al., 2021). Confident students are more capable of engaging in interactions and resolving conflicts constructively (Saputra & Wahyuni, 2020). Assertive skills also help students resist negative peer pressure (Rahmadani & Hasanah, 2021). Support from lecturers and peers further strengthens the application of assertive communication in daily life (Hartati & Anwar, 2023). This aligns with the concept of student empowerment through interpersonal skills training (Utami & Putra, 2022).

The findings of this study provide a foundation for developing integrated soft-skill curricula (Nuraini & Sari, 2021). By incorporating assertive communication content into new student orientation programs, campuses can foster a culture of positive communication (Amalia & Fitria, 2022). Other research suggests that assertive communication training enhances students' psychological resilience (Wulandari & Prasetyo, 2020). Thus, this training not only benefits academic performance but also supports students' mental well-being (Yuniarti & Ramadhani, 2021). Continuous training strategies are needed so that students' communication skills can continue to develop (Fauzi & Suryani, 2022).

Despite the demonstrated effectiveness of this training, long-term evaluation is still required to ensure that assertive skills are consistently implemented (Handayani & Putri, 2023). Collaboration among lecturers, counselors, and student organizations is crucial to support the sustainability of the program (Rohmah & Sari, 2022). Future studies could focus on the impact of assertive communication training on students' academic achievement and social relationships (Maulida & Fadilah, 2022). Additionally, the development of technology-based learning media may serve as an innovation in communication training (Fitria & Wulandari, 2023). With appropriate strategies, new students are expected to interact effectively and contribute to the creation of an inclusive campus environment (Pradana & Yuliana, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that assertive communication training has a positive impact on improving new students' knowledge of the definition, benefits, and objectives of assertive communication. The significant increase from pre-test to post-test scores demonstrates that the socialization method employed was effective and relevant. The training also enhanced students' readiness to interact and adapt to the dynamic campus environment. Therefore, assertive communication

training should be integrated as a core component of new student orientation programs. In the future, similar training is expected to be implemented continuously and integrated into soft-skill development curricula in higher education institutions.

In light of the results and conclusions, several recommendations can be addressed to higher education institutions, students, and health professionals. Universities are advised to include assertive communication training as a mandatory component of new student orientation programs. This is crucial to equip students with communication skills that support their adaptation to dynamic academic settings. The training materials should be tailored to the diverse backgrounds of students to ensure that all participants are reached effectively and equitably. Collaboration among academic advisors, counselors, and student organizations should be strengthened to support successful implementation of the training. When needed, universities may collaborate with mental health nursing professionals to further enhance students' assertive communication skills so that they can communicate and socialize effectively on campus, ultimately contributing to improved mental health quality.

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