

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Public speaking confidence as a crucial asset for leadership development in academic setting

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ABSTRACT

Public speaking is a vital skill that enables individuals to communicate ideas, influence others, and encourage meaningful connections. In academic leadership, public speaking is particularly important as it serves as a primary tool for inspiring faculty, staff, and students, articulating visions, and facilitating collaboration. Effective public speaking allows leaders to present complex ideas clearly, adapt their message to diverse audiences, and build trust through authentic and persuasive communication. This study explored the public speaking confidence of academic leaders and how this reflected towards leadership development. Academic leaders (n=24) from Eastern Visayas, Philippines were purposively sampled, composed of 8 school administrators, 8 school principals, and 8 department heads/deans. Narratives were collected through interviews and analyzed reflexively through inductive method, extracting codes forming general themes. Findings indicated that the academic leaders manifested public speaking confidence which can be linked to their effectiveness in leadership roles. Academic leaders highlighted that confidence was not only a personal trait but a professional necessity, allowing them to communicate ideas persuasively and establish authority. Confidence in public speaking enabled leaders to gain the trust of their audience and manage challenging scenarios, which helped in building strong professional relationships. However, the academic leaders also experienced challenges in public speaking like anxiety, self-doubt, administrative tasks, and distractions. Leaders recognized the value of formal education, such as advanced degrees and participation in conferences, which provided opportunities for immersion and observation of effective speaking techniques. Informal experiences, including casual conversations and peer feedback, also had essential role in their development. Practicing in a supportive environment that prioritized constructive criticism and encouragement was particularly beneficial. Institutional support, including access to coaching resources, workshops, and mentorship opportunities, further facilitated skill enhancement.

Keywords: academic leaders; communication; confidence; leadership; public speaking

1. Introduction

Effective communication is not just a skill; it's a necessity. Public speaking serves as a vital skill for academic leaders, enabling them to motivate colleagues, influence decision-making, and highlight collaboration^[1,2]. As educational institutions evolve to meet the challenges of a competitive global

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environment, the ability to articulate ideas clearly and persuasively becomes increasingly important. Leaders are often required to navigate complex institutional dynamics, engage with various stakeholders, and address diverse audiences, all of which demand a high level of communication proficiency^[3].

This study argues that while public speaking is crucial for academic leadership, enhancing these skills is fraught with challenges that leaders must navigate. The research aims to explore two key objectives: first, to examine how academic leaders perceive the significance of public speaking in their roles and to identify the specific challenges they encounter in honing these essential skills.

However, while the significance of these skills is well-established, the challenges that leaders face in developing their public speaking abilities cannot be overlooked. Many academic leaders report feelings of intimidation, nervousness, and time constraints that hinder their effectiveness^[4,5]. Moreover, leaders who communicate confidently are more likely to gain respect and inspire others toward organizational goals^[6]. Authentic and transparent communication increases a leader's perceived capability and trustworthiness^[7].

Knowledge of a subject is essential for effective academic leadership, but the ability to inspire others through communication is equally crucial^[8]. Public speaking allows leaders to share strategic visions and research findings in compelling ways^[9]. Furthermore, it encourages transparency and trust, key elements for establishing respect in academic settings^[10]. Emotional intelligence is vital in academic leadership, and public speaking allows leaders to demonstrate empathy and cultural sensitivity^[11]. As academic leaders often lead initiatives related to curriculum and faculty development, effective public speaking is essential for garnering support^[12].

2. Literature review

Academic leadership requires effective communication, and public speaking is a crucial component of this skill set. Effective public speakers can articulate their views clearly and compellingly, enhancing their influence over others^[13]. This ability not only allows leaders to convey their plans and objectives but also fosters an environment where creativity can thrive. Public speaking is essential for developing academic leadership, enabling leaders to convey ideas, motivate action, and cultivate relationships within the academic community^[14]. In roles such as administrators or department heads, leaders must often communicate complex ideas, policy changes, and strategic objectives to various stakeholders, including students, faculty, and the public. As educational institutions become more global and interconnected, strong public speaking skills are vital for leaders to influence and advance a shared vision.

Building credibility and trust is one of the most significant advantages of public speaking for academic leaders. Engaging with diverse constituents and articulating a clear, cohesive vision for the future are essential skills in academic leadership. For Fortner et al.^[15], "Leadership is not about titles, positions, or flowcharts....It is about one life impacting another." Leaders who speak with confidence and conviction are more likely to win the trust of stakeholders, students, and colleagues. Public speaking allows academic leaders to present themselves as knowledgeable, personable, and committed to their institution's mission—qualities that are critical for fostering a sense of belonging and community^[16]. Academic leaders can inspire and motivate their audience, which is vital in environments where emotional connection and engagement are essential^[17]. Thus, public speaking becomes a fundamental technique for effective leadership, bolstering teamwork and collective morale toward shared goals.

Beyond influencing internal stakeholders, public speaking empowers academic leaders to advocate for their institutions. Whether addressing conferences, fundraising events, or media outlets, leaders must effectively communicate their institution's strengths, values, and future aspirations^[18]. Public speaking serves

as a strategy for influencing external audiences such as legislators, industry partners, and potential donors^[19]. By clearly expressing the justification for change initiatives, they can foster a culture that values creativity and originality^[20]. The ability to craft and convey a compelling message is crucial for securing opportunities, partnerships, and resources that support long-term institutional success. Public speaking emerges as an essential skill for academic leaders, enabling them to navigate change, establish credibility, and promote their institutions on local, national, and global stages^[21]. This research aims to explore these challenges in more detail, examining how academic leaders perceive the significance of public speaking in their roles and identifying the specific challenges they encounter in honing these essential skills.

Fitzgerald^[22] explored the role of public speaking in primary schools, emphasizing the need for explicit training in this skill. Using a qualitative approach, the study combined literature reviews on public speaking, oral language, and communication skills with action research and teacher interviews to examine how public speaking training could enhance primary school students' self-efficacy and vocabulary development. The findings highlighted a prevalent fear of public speaking among adults, often linked to a lack of early training and unclear curriculum guidelines. The study revealed a gap in both policy and practice, with teachers uncertain about the inclusion of public speaking skills in the curriculum. Teacher and parent surveys (104 teachers and 136 parents) provided insights into the current state of public speaking education and its impact on children's development. The research underscored the importance of explicit public speaking instruction and suggested that further research is needed to bridge the gap between policy and practice. The thesis contributes to the growing body of evidence advocating for the inclusion of public speaking in primary school curricula, offering implications for future research, policy development, and teacher professional development in this area.

Tyler^[23] examined the communication strategies of principals at high-performing ~~Title-I~~ elementary schools to develop a division-level training program for improving communication skills among principals and aspiring principals. The research employed a qualitative approach, including semi-structured interviews with 8 principals, surveys, and publicly available data about these schools. The findings revealed 11 specific communication strategies commonly used by the principals, as well as 5 key themes in leadership communication: a student-centered decision-making approach, transparency, shared decision-making, the importance of faculty trust, and the role of principal preparation. Principals used personal, face-to-face communication with teachers, avoided large school meetings, and regularly participated in grade-level meetings to motivate teachers. The study also found that principal certification programs had limited impact on communication skills, highlighting the need for more structured, school division-level training. Tyler^[23] believed that effective communication is essential for building trust between principals and teachers, and that enhancing communication skills through mentoring and training is crucial for preparing school leaders to drive effective instruction. The findings underscore a significant gap in leadership training regarding communication, suggesting a need for more targeted development in this area.

Savellon, Asiri and Chavez^[11] examined the public speaking challenges faced by academic leaders and explore the resources and strategies they employ to manage public speaking anxiety. The research focused on Filipino academic leaders from both basic education and higher education institutions, using purposive sampling (n=20). The findings revealed that targeted support, such as professional development workshops and a supportive learning environment, played a crucial role in boosting their public speaking skills and confidence. Additionally, coping strategies like regular practice and seeking various speaking opportunities were identified as key methods for overcoming public speaking challenges. The study highlighted the importance of continuous training and support initiatives to empower academic leaders, fostering an environment that promotes their professional growth and development. The findings emphasize a gap in

structured support for academic leaders in public speaking, suggesting a need for more comprehensive programs to address this area.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of public speaking as a crucial asset for academic leadership development. Through individual interviews, the research aimed to uncover the subtleties of participants' experiences and perspectives on public speaking in their roles. Qualitative research, with its focus on exploring concepts and themes, is particularly well-suited for this purpose^[24]. The exploratory design allows for the identification of key themes, relationships, and narratives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with developing public speaking skills in academic leadership^[25].

3.2. Population and sampling

The study involved eight school administrators, eight school principals, and eight department heads/deans from Eastern Visayas, Philippines as participants. Using purposive sampling—a non-probability method that allows researchers to select individuals based on specific criteria such as expertise and willingness to participate^[26,27]—the researchers targeted participants who had experience in leading and managing academic institutions, demonstrated a commitment to professional development, and expressed a willingness to share their insights on public speaking. This approach was particularly advantageous given the limited pool of individuals with the specific expertise and willingness to participate, ensuring the collection of rich and relevant data for the study^[28]. Online purposive sampling^[29,30], through open-ended survey, was conducted using Google Forms to gather preliminary insights from potential participants. Out of 47 who responded in the survey, participants were selected based on three characteristics: years in service (>10 years), participation in institutional decision-making, has clear background in leadership, and trainings (>100 cumulative hours of training).

3.3. Research instrument

In this study, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method for data collection. Researchers gathered insights by posing a variety of questions about participants' experiences, views, goals, and concerns^[31]. As noted by Naz et al.^[32], this approach promotes a conversational dynamic, allowing participants to share nuanced thoughts that may not emerge in more rigid questioning formats. Furthermore, this method creates an inviting environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing their unique perspectives and experiences^[25].

Table 1. Interview questions.

Objectives	Interview Questions
How do academic leaders perceive the importance of public speaking skills in their roles as academic leaders?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In your opinion, how essential are public speaking skills to your effectiveness as an academic leader? 2. Can you provide examples of situations where strong public speaking skills have positively impacted your leadership role? 3. How do you believe public speaking influences your ability to communicate with faculty, staff, and students? 4. What specific aspects of public speaking do you think are most critical for success in academic leadership? 5. How do you assess your own public speaking skills, and in what ways do you seek to improve them as an academic leader?
What challenges do academic leaders face in developing their public speaking abilities?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What specific challenges have you encountered when trying to improve your public speaking skills? 2. How do time constraints and other responsibilities impact your ability to focus

Objectives	Interview Questions
	on developing your public speaking abilities?
	3. Can you describe any resources or training programs that you have found beneficial for overcoming challenges in public speaking?
	4. How do you perceive the role of feedback from colleagues and peers in your public speaking development?
	5. What support systems or environments do you believe are necessary for academic leaders to enhance their public speaking skills effectively?

Table 1. (Continued)

3.4. Data gathering procedure

In-depth interviews were conducted, with participants chosen through purposive sampling to focus on individuals experienced in inclusive education practices. Open-ended, semi-structured questions were designed to gather in-depth information about their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. To preserve the accuracy of participants' responses, all recordings were transcribed verbatim after the interviews. Following a thorough review of the transcripts for accuracy, participants were given the chance to provide additional insights or clarifications. Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld throughout the study.

3.5. Data analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to extract insights from participants interviews. It involves the researcher's reflective and careful interaction with their data, as well as their thoughtful engagement with the analysis process^[33]. Prior to compilation, the themes in the dataset were identified, assessed, and scrutinized^[34]. This popular method seeks to find reoccurring themes to uncover more profound interpretations and meanings^[35], ensuring the data analysis procedure is understandable and practical^[34].

4. Results

Objective 1: How do academic respondents perceive the importance of public speaking skills in their roles as academic respondents?

Question 1. In your Opinion, how essential are public speaking skills to your effectiveness as an academic leader?

1.1 Persuasion and influence tool

Ten academic leaders emphasized that public speaking was an effective presenting tool which helped them influence all stakeholders and get through what they wanted to communicate. They believed that if results are achieved in the area of communication, then it will achieve the desired outcomes, including the approval of projects and changes in teams.

"Public speaking is very important in terms of persuasion, how you convince people to go on your side, it becomes a good pathway to get approvals from them."

"In most cases, academic leaders believe that effectiveness partly depends on how effectively they can expound their ideas in public."

1.2 Knowledge dissemination and clarity

Seven academic leaders clearly pointed out that public speaking is essential for clearly conveying knowledge to students and preventing miscommunication. They recognized that poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, which significantly hampers their effectiveness as leaders.

"If your public speaking space is not good, you will not be able to translate the knowledge that you wanted for students to grasp."

"Through public speaking, I can reach out to people, motivate them, and pass on the important information that they ought to know."

1.3 Building trust and confidence

Seven leaders from scholarship programs highlighted that effective public speaking hinges on establishing trust and confidence with students, staff, and parents. They asserted that clear and confident communication is foundational to earning respect as a leader.

"Respect and trust among the people I work with are achieved through good speaking."

"Public speaking serves as an important function of academic leaders and instills confidence."

Question 2: Can you provide examples of situations where strong public speaking skills have positively impacted your leadership role?

2.1 Professional settings

Eleven academic leaders emphasize how effective public speaking skills have enabled them to communicate effectively in meetings, presentations, as well as during academia conferences. They noted that professionalism in tone and delivery leads to positive outcomes, such as gaining approval for various projects and facilitating fruitful discussions.

"In conferences, you have to be very professional, your public speaking gets the criteria of how they view a good research presenter. Strong communication allows for exchange of ideas, so people will also subscribe to what you want to happen."

"I recall a successful presentation within a meeting where clear communication and confident delivery helped secure the desired outcome."

2.2 Building relationships

Public speaking was also taken as an approach to develop a close relation with the various stakeholders of the school community. Six respondents explained that their public speaking skills allowed them to engage effectively with students, staff, and parents during school assemblies, parent-teacher conferences, and large meetings, creating a sense of coherence and reciprocal trust.

"I often use public speaking in school assemblies or parent-teacher meetings. My ability to hold a huge crowd requires me to be very interactive, this fosters unity and confidence in the school community."

"Public speaking helped me address both respectful and rude individuals in the academe, managing different groups in a way that ensures collaboration and understanding."

2.3 Educating and mentoring students

Seven academic leaders also shared examples of how public speaking skills helped them educate and mentor the students. They emphasized that effectively communicating key concepts not only clarifies lessons but also translates into real-life applications, contributing to the development of well-rounded individuals.

"When the students are able to really understand the concepts that you wanted them to get, that's a positive impact, they can apply that to their daily lives, whether as managers or business owners."

"Another is when teaching students how to build up honesty, confidence, and leadership."

Question 3: How do you believe public speaking influences your ability to communicate with faculty, staff, and students?

3.1 Clarity and trust in communication

Fourteen participants emphasized the role of public speaking in fostering clarity and trust. They highlighted that effective public speaking ensures messages are clear and direct, which facilitates understanding of decision-making processes and cultivates an atmosphere of trust among faculty, staff, and students. This clarity in communication not only aids in conveying significant decisions but also encourages open dialogue within the academic community.

"Public speaking clarifies and establishes trust, transparency that is incorporated into communicating significant decisions. It empowers academic leaders to open a forum for dialogue."

3.2 Collaboration and inspiration

Four participants highlighted public speaking as a vital tool for fostering collaboration and inspiring action, especially in team settings. Strong public speaking skills enable educators to convey complex ideas, alleviate concerns, and motivate others to engage with the institution's goals. By effectively communicating their vision, educators can build relationships and establish credibility, which promotes a shared sense of purpose within the academic environment.

"Public speaking enables me to convey complex ideas, address concerns, and foster collaboration. It helps build relationships, establish credibility, and promote a shared vision."

3.3 Audience adaptation

Furthermore, six participants emphasized the importance of tailoring communication styles to different audiences, such as faculty, staff, and students. Participants recognized that effective public speaking varies depending on the audience's expectations and dynamics. Adapting their approach allows educators to meet the specific needs of each group, ensuring effective communication across various academic contexts.

"With faculty, there is a certain way of managing communication, they have certain entitlements and expectations. With students, you need to request things with respect, but sometimes a bit of intimidation may be necessary."

Question 4: What specific aspects of public speaking do you think are most critical for success in academic leadership?

4.1 Clarity and brevity

Five participants emphasized the necessity of clear communication for effective leadership. They noted that messages must be conveyed clearly to faculty, staff, and students to prevent misunderstandings and ensure that everyone is aligned with the leader's vision.

"Clarity is very important for understanding. People will follow you through with your speech if they know that you are very organized in the delivery of the message."

"First, I have to be clear. If I am not clear, people will misunderstand the message that I am communicating."

4.2 Confidence and authority

Eight respondents highlighted that self-confidence is essential for effective leadership in public speaking. A confident speaker is taken seriously, making it more likely that the audience will follow their lead. However, participants noted that this authority must be balanced with emotional intelligence and approachability.

"Confidence and authority, emotional intelligence and impact, and empathy, if I am confident, people are going to take my message seriously and follow my lead."

"Confident delivery is vital for public speaking."

4.3 Audience engagement

Engaging the audience was another critical aspect emphasized by four respondents. Effective public speaking involves capturing and maintaining the audience's attention, whether through storytelling, questioning, or adjusting one's tone. Furthermore, two respondents pointed out the importance of understanding the audience and adjusting the speech accordingly. Knowing the audience makes it easier to tailor messages to meet their expectations, backgrounds, and personalities, enhancing communication effectiveness.

"Methods of confidence and engagement, like storytelling and making them feel part of the speech, give the audience the trust to act on the information."

"You need to know your audience. If you know your audience, you know what to say and what not to say."

4.4 Non-verbal communication

Five participants highlighted the significance of non-verbal communication, such as body language and eye contact. These cues help create rapport with the audience and foster an approachable atmosphere for open collaboration.

"Body language and eye contact are important because they give the idea that I am approachable and open to communication."

Question 5: How do you assess your own public speaking skills, and in what ways do you seek to improve them as an academic leader?

5.1 Self-assessment and reflection

Eight respondents indicated that they regularly evaluate their public speaking skills through personal reflection and by assessing audience reactions. They pay attention to how their speeches are received, whether the audience appears engaged, and if their messages are understood.

"I assess how people are responding to my speeches. If they ask questions or appear bored, then I know something needs to be improved."

"I self-assess through feedback, reflection, and seeking opportunities to practice."

5.2 Feedback from colleague and students

Four respondents reported actively seeking feedback from colleagues and students to gauge their public speaking abilities. External judgments provide valuable insights into areas for improvement.

"I ask my colleagues for feedback, as they may be able to tell me if my pace, tone, or clarity is off at times."

"There are some presentations where I ask my colleagues if the content is correct, as content is also very important, not just clarity."

5.3 Practice and workshops

Improvement is a recurring theme among three respondents, who often attend workshops, conferences, and seminars to enhance their public speaking skills. Engaging in frequent speaking opportunities helps build and sustain confidence.

"I prepare for my speeches, attend workshops, and listen to other leaders so I may take some ideas from them."

"I improve by attending workshops, seminars, and seeking mentor-ship from experienced public speakers."

5.4 Adaptation and flexibility

Six respondents highlighted the necessity of adapting their public speaking styles to different audiences and contexts. This flexibility is crucial for success in various forums, whether addressing students, colleagues, or external audiences.

"I speak in different settings such as conferences or public forums to enhance my level of confidence and learn to adapt to different audiences."

"I do a lot of public speaking in terms of research with different sets of audiences."

5.5. Content and message importance

A few respondents (n=3) emphasized that effective public speaking involves more than just delivery; the content must be substantial as well. They believe that the precision and organization of the message are equally important as clear and confident delivery.

"People gauge or measure you in terms of your content, not just the way you speak. It goes hand in hand."

"If my public speaking skills are not good, the students will not grasp what I am imparting, and that would be a failure."

Objective 2: What challenges do academic leaders face in developing their public speaking abilities?

Question 6. What specific challenges have you encountered when trying to improve your public speaking skills?

6.1 Anxiety and environmental factors

Four participants expressed feelings of intimidation and nervousness, especially when presenting before esteemed colleagues or large audiences. In addition to personal anxiety, some respondents (n=3) highlighted environmental factors that impact their effectiveness. They pointed out that external conditions, such as noise or unsuitable venues, can distract the audience and hinder communication.

"Coming over nervousness when speaking to large audiences is one of the biggest challenges I've faced."

"It's really difficult to speak when the environment is not good because the audience may not be listening."

6.2 Engaging diverse audiences

Another significant challenge faced by academic leaders (n=7) is keeping the audience engaged and interested, particularly in mixed or critical settings. They expressed difficulty in ensuring that their messages resonate with diverse audiences. Additionally, academic leaders often struggle to find the right balance between being authoritative and relatable in their presentation styles. Two participants indicated that using overly formal language can alienate their audience.

"It's not easy to ensure that the audience remains attentive and interested."

"Figuring out where to draw the line between sounding professional and being relatable is challenging."

6.3 Self-Doubt and lack of practice

Many leaders (n=8) identified self-doubt and a lack of time for practice as significant barriers to improving their public speaking skills. Several expressed that limited opportunities for rehearsal hinder their development.

"Time constraints, self-doubt, and nervousness were initial challenges for me."

"It is not easy to get regular practice, as I do not always have the chance to give speeches in a formal setup."

Question 7. How do time constraints and other responsibilities impact your ability to focus on developing your public speaking abilities?

7.1 Skill development barriers

A combination of time constraints and competing responsibilities significantly impacts academic leaders' ability to improve their public speaking skills. Twelve leaders reported that these factors consistently hinder their opportunities to practice and develop. Competing obligations—such as teaching, administrative duties, and family commitments—often leave little time for refining their public speaking abilities. To address these challenges, twelve (12) leaders emphasized the importance of prioritization and time management. They agreed that setting aside dedicated time for preparation, practice, and resource gathering is essential for improving their public speaking skills.

"Time devoted to developing my public speaking skills is usually limited because workloads and other leadership responsibilities dominate the day."

"Time management is crucial; I allocate time for practice, preparation, and seeking resources."

Question 8. Can you describe any resources or training programs that you have found beneficial for overcoming challenges in public speaking?

8.1 Formal education and higher learning

Various academic leaders (n=11) mentioned formal education that could provide an avenue for improvement in public speaking skills through practice and exposure. Higher education provided a chance for practice and immersion in talking activities. Moreover, attending conferences and seminars to observe great speakers who were influential was mentioned by three academic leaders as one of the effective methods for learning. This avenue opens up different speakers' styles and techniques.

"I took my MA in English, where I was immersed in activities related to language and speaking."

"Attending conferences allows me to observe how other leaders handle public speaking situations."

8.2 Informal training and practice

Four leaders also pointed to the importance of informal learning from casual discussions and different speaking opportunities. Speaking before diverse audiences in various settings is also a form of confidence building and adaptability.

"Casual conversations serve as valuable training, providing experiences with diverse audiences."

"Practicing in different situations helps prepare for formal public speaking events."

8.3 Peer feedback and mentorship

Feedback from colleagues and peers is a vital resource for professional growth. Six participants highlighted the value of engaging in activities like mentoring and collaborative learning, which contribute significantly to skills development.

"I appreciate feedback from colleagues, which helps me refine my speaking skills."

"Peers provide resources and ideas through mentorship in their places of study."

Question 9. How do you perceive the role of feedback from colleagues and peers in your public speaking development?

9.1 Value of constructive feedback

Five participants emphasized that constructive feedback would not be insignificant to improve public speaking skills. They went a mile further in hammering it in that the feedback that identifies areas for improvement recognizes strengths. Moreover, four participants highlighted that feedback creates a great and friendly atmosphere from colleagues which is always important for constant change. The teachers appreciated the comforting they received, which is usually associated with building trust in the academic world.

"Feedback from colleagues can be particularly useful for clarifying and ensuring relevance in conveying the message."

"Constructive criticisms are vital for improvement, and it's important to view them positively."

9.2 Self-reflection and growth

Seven participants considered it a reflective period, therefore giving the educator the chance to reflect on their delivery and content. Most also noted that good criticism makes an individual develop both on personal and professional levels.

"There is feedback considered priceless for development; it helps us work on our message and deliver better."

"Honest feedback makes me realize areas where I need to change and allows me the opportunity to make corrections."

9.3 Enhancing communication skills

Eight participants noted that feedback from colleagues and peers helps identify specific areas of communication that may need some rework, including pacing, eye contact, and certainly speech clarity.

"They can mention things I would not catch otherwise, like talking too quickly or unclear diction."

"Constructive criticism helps refine my message, tone, and delivery."

Question 10. What support systems or environments do you believe are necessary for academic leaders to enhance their public speaking skills effectively?

10.1 Basic skills and content knowledge

Three participants stressed the importance of a teacher who exemplifies excellence in basic public speaking skills, such as content production and audience awareness. They believe that a teacher who embodies these skills is crucial for students to master them effectively.

"Go to content production writing, then know where you're comfortable, know specific strengths."

"You have to learn certain communication types and the content that you use that can be relatable to them."

10.2 Supportive environment

Eight participants stressed the value of practicing public speaking in a supportive environment where constructive criticism and encouragement are prioritized. This practice not only enhances skills but also builds confidence. The importance of mentorship and peer groups was also highlighted, as they provide guidance and feedback. Furthermore, five participants emphasized that family and friends serve as a crucial support system, offering motivation and encouragement. A supportive circle can significantly impact an academic leader's journey towards public speaking improvement.

"The number one support system is the family... important, like friends who are also rooting for your success."

"A supportive environment where practice is possible without being judged."

10.3 Institutional support and resources

Eight participants emphasized the need for institutional support to foster public speaking expertise. They highlighted the importance of developing a learning culture, providing access to speaking coaching resources, and allocating time and resources for staff to attend training.

"Creating a culture of continuous learning and development, access to public speaking coaching within the institution."

"Resources such as workshops or coaching for public speaking give one the direction in their improvement process."

5. Discussion

Objective 1. How do academic leaders perceive the importance of public speaking skills in their roles as academic leaders?

The study confirms the widely acknowledged importance of public speaking in academic leadership. Participants consistently highlighted its role in persuasion, knowledge transfer, building trust, and inspiring action. They emphasized how effective public speaking skills enabled them to influence stakeholders, communicate complex ideas, and foster a sense of community within their institutions. This aligns with existing research emphasizing the importance of communication in leadership^[6-9]. One academic leader's journey towards confidence in public speaking serves as an inspiring example of how this skill can shape leadership abilities. Initially, he viewed public speaking as a critical tool for influencing others and achieving outcomes in academic settings. He remarked, *"Public speaking is very important in terms of persuasion, how you convince people to go on your side, it becomes a good pathway to get approvals from them."* Over time, he recognized that his ability to clearly convey ideas not only facilitated professional success but also built trust with those around him.

Participants articulated that public speaking serves as a powerful tool for influencing stakeholders, conveying complex ideas, and fostering a cohesive community within their institutions. The ability to clearly articulate ideas enhances leaders' effectiveness, as they are better positioned to gain approval for projects and drive institutional change. This aligns with De Leon et al.^[36], who argue that effective communication can mitigate resistance to change by addressing concerns and providing clarity about new initiatives.

Further, the findings reflect the importance of emotional connection in communication. As Garil et al.^[3] suggest, observable cues that reveal the emotional bond between speakers and their audiences can significantly enhance engagement and collaboration. The emotional resonance fostered through public speaking creates a positive learning environment where information is not merely transmitted but also understood and internalized^[37]. This emotional connection is particularly important in educational settings, where the impact of a leader's message can be profound. The academic leader's development was further enhanced through a combination of reflection and feedback. One acknowledged, *"I assess how people are responding to my speeches. If they ask questions or appear bored, then I know something needs to be improved."* This self-awareness, paired with feedback from colleagues and students, helped him continuously refine his approach. Following that, he actively sought opportunities to practice, attending workshops and engaging in various public speaking settings. As he shared, *"I prepare for my speeches, attend workshops, and listen to other leaders so I may take some ideas from them."*

The ability to adapt communication styles to different audiences emerged as a critical factor for success. Participants recognized that tailoring their approach based on the audience's expectations and dynamics enhances communication effectiveness. This adaptability reflects a nuanced understanding of public

speaking, emphasizing the need for leaders to engage with diverse stakeholders in ways that resonate with them^[3].

Objective 2. What challenges do academic leaders face in developing their public speaking abilities?

The findings reveal that despite the acknowledged importance of public speaking, academic leaders encounter a range of challenges that impede their development in this area. Key barriers include feelings of intimidation and nervousness, particularly when addressing esteemed colleagues or large audiences. Such psychological hurdles can significantly diminish confidence and hinder effective communication. Unfavorable speaking environments—like noisy or distracting venues—further exacerbate these issues, affecting both audience engagement and the speaker's ability to convey their message clearly.

Maintaining audience interest in diverse settings, especially when faced with critical or mixed responses, poses another significant challenge. Leaders struggle to balance authoritative language with relatable communication, making it difficult to connect with various audience members. This struggle is compounded by limited opportunities for practice, as many academic leaders juggle numerous responsibilities, leaving little time to refine their public speaking skills. Self-doubt also plays a critical role, creating a cycle that discourages improvement and mastery.

These challenges resonate with existing research that highlights the psychological and practical difficulties associated with public speaking^[4,5]. During periods of institutional change, effective public speakers are essential in addressing fears and uncertainties, facilitating smoother transitions^[38]. As the leader advanced in their development, they encountered the challenge of engaging diverse audiences. They admitted, *"It's not easy to ensure that the audience remains attentive and interested,"* acknowledging the struggle of balancing authority with relatability in a presentation. This challenge sparked a deeper understanding of audience dynamics, which the leader used to refine their communication approach. The ability to strike the right tone and deliver an engaging message became a vital skill in enhancing their leadership.

To overcome these challenges, participants emphasized the necessity of formal and informal training, constructive feedback, and institutional support. This focus on support systems aligns with literature that advocates for mentorship, coaching, and collaborative learning as vital components of effective leadership development^[13,39,40]. The leader shared, *"I took my MA in English, where I was immersed in activities related to language and speaking,"* noting how academic exposure to speaking tasks helped build confidence. Informally, they learned from casual conversations and diverse speaking opportunities, which proved instrumental in adapting to various audiences. Peer feedback also played a pivotal role in their development. *"Constructive criticisms are vital for improvement, and it's important to view them positively,"* they said, recognizing the value of feedback in refining their speaking skills. This continuous cycle of self-reflection and feedback empowered the leader to enhance both their personal and professional growth. Academic institutions must prioritize the creation of supportive environments that encourage skill development and allow leaders to practice their public speaking without fear of judgment.

Furthermore, development is significantly shaped by social contexts—home, school, and community—which have recently gained relevance in educational collaborations^[41]. They acknowledged the importance of a supportive environment for improving public speaking. They emphasized, *"The number one support system is the family... important, like friends who are also rooting for your success,"* demonstrating how crucial emotional support is in cultivating confidence and motivation. The leader also saw the value of institutional support, noting that workshops and speaking coaching were essential in honing their skills.

6. Conclusion

This research underscored the vital role of public speaking in academic leadership, highlighting its influence on stakeholder engagement, effective communication, and trust-building. The findings revealed that while public speaking was acknowledged as essential, many academic leaders encountered significant barriers in developing these skills—such as intimidation, nervousness, environmental factors, and self-doubt.

To address these challenges, it was crucial for institutions to cultivate supportive environments that facilitated skill development. This included offering both formal and informal training opportunities, showing a culture of constructive feedback, and providing resources like practice spaces and coaching. By creating a safe atmosphere where leaders could hone their public speaking abilities without fear of judgment, institutions empowered them to become more confident and effective communicators.

Moreover, the implications of this research extended beyond individual skill development; they pointed to a broader need for institutional commitment to leadership training as a means of enhancing overall organizational effectiveness. As academic leaders refined their public speaking skills, they could inspire greater engagement and collaboration within their communities, ultimately integrating a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.

While this study offered valuable insights, its limitations should be acknowledged. The limited sample size may not have fully represented the diverse experiences of all academic leaders, and the reliance on qualitative data restricted the generalizability of the findings. Future research could have enhanced our understanding of this topic by examining the correlation between public speaking proficiency and leadership effectiveness through quantitative studies, utilizing larger and more diverse samples, and incorporating a variety of data sources. Ultimately, enhancing public speaking skills was not just an individual endeavor; it was an organizational imperative that could lead to transformative outcomes in academic leadership and community engagement.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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