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## PEER MENTORING-BASED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TO STRENGTHEN SECRETARIAL COMPETENCE OF VOCATIONAL STUDENTS

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### **Abstrak**

*Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kompetensi profesi kesekretariatan siswa Kelas XII Departemen Manajemen Perkantoran dan Jasa Bisnis (MBSD) SMK Negeri 7 Medan. Program ini melibatkan 30 siswa dan dilaksanakan dengan menggunakan pendekatan pembelajaran berdasarkan pengalaman yang dikombinasikan dengan pendampingan sebaya melalui tahap persiapan, pelatihan, pendampingan, dan evaluasi. Kegiatan tersebut meliputi pelatihan interaktif, role-play komunikasi bisnis, praktik Google Workspace, penyusunan CV profesional, dan simulasi wawancara kerja. Hasil evaluasi menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa meningkatkan pemahaman mereka tentang standar etika dan penampilan profesi, keterampilan komunikasi bisnis, literasi kantor digital, dan kesiapan untuk rekrutmen kerja. Siswa juga menunjukkan kepercayaan diri yang lebih baik dalam menangani komunikasi telepon, berbicara di depan umum, manajemen dokumen digital, dan situasi wawancara. Program ini memperkuat kolaborasi universitas-sekolah vokasi dan dapat menjadi model praktis untuk meningkatkan kesiapan kerja mahasiswa vokasi sesuai dengan tuntutan industri.*

**Kata kunci:** *Pendampingan Sebaya; Sekretaris Profesional; Sekolah Kejuruan; Komunikasi Bisnis; Literasi Digital.*

### **Abstract**

This community service program aimed to improve the professional secretarial competence of Grade XII students of the Office Management and Business Services Department (MBSD) at SMK Negeri 7 Medan. The program involved 30 students and was implemented using an experiential learning approach combined with peer mentoring through preparation, training, mentoring, and evaluation stages. The activities included interactive training, business communication role-play, Google Workspace practice, professional CV preparation, and job interview simulation. The evaluation results showed that students improved their understanding of professional ethics and appearance standards, business communication skills, digital office literacy, and readiness for job recruitment. Students also demonstrated better confidence in handling telephone communication, public speaking, digital document management, and interview situations. This program strengthens university-vocational school collaboration and can serve as a practical model for improving vocational students' work readiness in line with industry demands.

**Keywords:** Peer Mentoring; Professional Secretary; Vocational School; Business Communication; Digital Literacy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Vocational education plays a strategic role in preparing graduates who are ready to enter the workforce. However, the mismatch between vocational graduates' competencies and the demands of the business and industrial world remains a persistent issue in Indonesia. BPS-Statistics Indonesia reported that the national open unemployment rate reached 4.68% in February 2026. In North Sumatra, the open unemployment rate was 5.32% in August 2025, with vocational high school graduates recording the highest unemployment rate among educational groups at 7.19% (BPS, 2025, 2026). These data indicate that vocational graduates still require targeted competency strengthening, particularly in professional attitudes, workplace communication, digital administration, and job readiness.

State Vocational High School 7 Medan is one of the vocational education institutions in Medan that focuses on business and management. One of its key concentrations is Office Management and Business Services, which is designed to prepare students for administrative, secretarial, and business service roles. As modern workplaces continue to shift toward digital, collaborative, and service-oriented work systems, MBSD students are expected not only to master basic administrative skills but also to demonstrate professional ethics, effective communication, digital office literacy, and readiness for recruitment processes.

Previous studies show that the alignment between vocational school competencies and industry needs remains an important concern in vocational education (Hidayat & Susanti, 2025; Hidayati et al., 2021; Pemata et al., 2025). In the context of secretarial and office administration work, technical skills such as typing, filing, and document preparation are no longer sufficient. Prospective secretarial staff must also possess interpersonal skills, professional appearance, digital literacy, and the ability to adapt to organizational culture (Putranto et al., 2024; Setyawati, 2020). Therefore, practical and contextual training is needed to bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace expectations.

Based on preliminary observations and interviews with school representatives, Grade XII students of the MBSD Department at SMK Negeri 7 Medan faced several competency gaps. These gaps covered four main areas: professional ethics and self-image, business communication, cloud-based office technology literacy, and job recruitment readiness. Professional ethics and appearance are important because secretarial staff often represent the image of an organization in formal interactions (Anggraini et al., 2025; Dewani, 2024). Business communication skills, including telephone handling, guest service, and public speaking, are also essential for students who will work in office administration and service environments (Indriany et al., 2025; Malayati et al., 2025).

Another important issue concerns digital office literacy. Modern administrative work increasingly requires cloud-based collaboration, digital document management, online scheduling, and paperless office practices. However,



students' learning experiences still tend to focus on basic and offline office applications, while the workplace requires more adaptive digital competencies (Kusuma, 2021; Safira & Oktarina, 2025). In addition, students need stronger preparation for job recruitment, including professional CV writing, personal branding, and interview readiness. These competencies are closely related to students' ability to transition from school to the workplace (Pemata et al., 2025; Suhendra et al., 2025).

In this context, the Diploma 3 Secretary Program at the University of North Sumatra has a strategic role as an academic partner. Through the involvement of lecturers and students, the program can provide practical knowledge transfer and peer mentoring for vocational students. Peer mentoring is considered relevant because the relatively close age gap between university students and vocational students can create a more communicative and accessible learning process. This approach allows students to learn through direct practice, simulation, and feedback in a setting that resembles workplace situations.

Therefore, this community service program aimed to improve the professional secretarial competence of 30 Grade XII students of the Office Management and Business Services Department at SMK Negeri 7 Medan. The program focused on four competency areas: professional ethics, business communication, digital office literacy, and job readiness. Through experiential learning and peer mentoring, this activity was expected to strengthen students' technical and non-technical competencies and support collaboration between universities and vocational schools in improving work readiness.

## **METHOD**

This community service activity was conducted at State Vocational High School 7 Medan using a participatory approach based on training and mentoring. The activity involved 30 Grade XII students of the Office Management and Business Services Department (MBSD). The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the criteria that they were Grade XII MBSD students who were preparing to enter internships, job recruitment processes, or workplace environments related to office administration and secretarial work. The method was designed to improve students' competencies in modern secretarial work, encompassing professional ethics, business communication, digital office literacy, and work readiness.

The approach used in this activity is experiential learning combined with peer mentoring. This approach emphasizes hands-on, experiential learning, where students not only receive theoretical material but also engage in simulated practices that mimic real-world work conditions. Diploma 3 Secretary students from the University of North Sumatra serve as peer mentors, accompanying students in each

training session and ensuring a more communicative and applicable knowledge transfer process.

The implementation of activities is divided into four main stages as follows: First, preparation stage. This phase includes initial coordination with SMK Negeri 7 Medan, obtaining activity permits, and analyzing student needs. Training materials covering secretarial professional ethics, business communications, modern office administration, and the use of cloud-based digital technology are also developed. The team also prepares learning support tools, including modules, presentation materials, and sample work documents.

Second, training implementation stage. This Stage is the core of the activity, conducted face-to-face (offline). Material is delivered through a combination of interactive lectures, discussions, demonstrations, and simulations (role-play). The main materials provided include: professional ethics and professional appearance of a secretary, business communications (telephone handling, public speaking, guest service), digital-based office administration (paperless office), using Google Workspace for document and schedule management, job interview simulation and professional CV preparation.

Third, mentoring and practice stage. In this Stage, students engage in hands-on practice through simulated work situations, such as answering business calls, serving office guests, and managing digital documents. The community service team provides direct guidance to ensure each student can apply the material presented. The approach used is participatory, ensuring students are actively involved in each activity.

Fourth, evaluation and monitoring stage. The evaluation stage was conducted using a non-test evaluation model because the activity did not administer pre-test and post-test instruments. Evaluation focused on observable student performance during training and mentoring activities. The assessment covered four main aspects: understanding of professional ethics and appearance, business communication practice, digital office literacy, and job recruitment readiness. The community service team observed students' participation during role-play, telephone handling practice, Google Workspace practice, CV preparation, and job interview simulation. Participant feedback was also collected to identify students' responses to the relevance, clarity, and usefulness of the training materials. Follow-up monitoring was conducted by reviewing students' practical outputs and documenting the implementation process.

Data in this community service activity were obtained through several techniques: direct observation during training, mentoring, and simulation activities; interviews with school representatives and participants; documentation of training, mentoring, discussion, and simulation activities; practical assessment of student performance in role-play, Google Workspace practice, CV preparation, and interview simulation; participant feedback regarding the relevance and usefulness



of the training. The data were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively. Observation notes, practical assessment results, student outputs, documentation, and participant feedback were interpreted to describe changes in students' observable performance after the training. The analysis did not use statistical testing because no pre-test and post-test were administered. Therefore, the findings are presented as descriptive evidence of students' competency development in professional ethics, business communication, digital office literacy, and job readiness.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULT**

The Community Service (PkM) program began with observations and coordination with the school in March 2026. The community service team identified needs and held discussions with the principal and teachers about student competencies that needed improvement. Observations revealed that students still had limitations in professional ethics, business communication, the use of modern administrative technology, and workplace readiness.

Furthermore, on April 7, 2026, the community service team, assisted by students, conducted training and mentoring activities for students at SMK Negeri 7 Medan. The activities were conducted through lectures, discussions, simulations (role-plays), hands-on practice, and evaluations. The materials provided covered secretarial professionalism and ethics, business communication, the use of digital office technology, curriculum vitae (CV) writing, personal branding, and job interview simulations.

Based on direct observation during the activity, students showed active participation in the interactive training, role-play, digital practice, CV preparation, and interview simulation. In the professional ethics session, students were able to identify basic standards of professional appearance, workplace attitude, and secretary etiquette. During the business communication practice, students practiced telephone handling, guest service, and short public speaking scenarios. The role-play activities showed that students became more confident in responding to formal communication situations, although some still needed guidance in using structured and professional expressions.

In the digital literacy session, students were introduced to cloud-based administrative work through Google Workspace. Students practiced managing documents, organizing digital files, and using digital tools to support office administration. The activity showed that students were able to follow the basic steps of digital document management, although their prior experience was still mostly limited to offline office applications.

In the job readiness session, students practiced preparing professional CVs and participating in job interview simulations. The CV preparation activity produced student CV drafts that were reviewed by the community service team. The interview

simulation also helped students practice introducing themselves, explaining their strengths, and responding to basic interview questions. Based on participant feedback, students considered the training relevant to their preparation for entering the workplace because the materials were practical and directly related to office administration and secretarial work.

The community service team delivering training materials to Grade XII students of the Office Management and Business Services Department (MBSD) at SMK Negeri 7 Medan. In this session, the participants received an introduction to professional secretarial competence, including professional ethics, workplace appearance, business communication, digital office literacy, and job readiness. The activity was conducted in a face-to-face format through interactive explanation and discussion, allowing students to actively engage with the material and relate it to real workplace situations as shown on Figure 1 .



Figure 1. Community Service Team Delivering Material to Participants

Students' active participation during the interactive training and discussion session as shown on Figure 2. In this activity, students were guided directly by the community service team and peer mentors to understand the practical aspects of professional secretarial work. The discussion allowed participants to ask questions, respond to examples, and relate the training materials to real office situations. This session also encouraged students to be more engaged in learning about business communication, digital office practices, and job readiness.



Figure 2. Students Participate in Interactive Training and Discussion

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The activity was closed with a group photo of the community service team, school partners, peer mentors, and Grade XII MBSD students after the completion of the training activities as shown on Figure 3. This documentation represents the collaborative implementation of the program between the Diploma 3 Secretary Program at the University of North Sumatra and SMK Negeri 7 Medan. The activity involved lecturers, university students, school representatives, and participants in a shared effort to strengthen students' professional secretarial competence, particularly in professional ethics, business communication, digital office literacy, and job readiness.



Figure 3. Group Photo of the Community Service Team, Partners, and Activity Participants

The activity also strengthened collaboration between the Diploma 3 Secretary Program at the University of North Sumatra and SMK Negeri 7 Medan. This collaboration enabled knowledge transfer through lecturer guidance and peer mentoring by university students. Overall, the results indicate that the program provided practical learning experiences that supported students' professional secretarial competence, particularly in professional ethics, business communication, digital office literacy, and job readiness.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this community service program indicate observable development in students' professional secretarial competence, particularly in professional ethics, business communication, digital office literacy, and job readiness. Since the program did not use pre-test and post-test instruments, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically significant improvement. Instead, the results reflect descriptive evidence obtained from observation, practical assessment, student outputs, documentation, and participant feedback.

Increasing students' understanding of professional ethics and professional self-image shows that professional grooming plays an important role in shaping a secretary's work identity (Anggraini et al., 2025; Dewani, 2024). Before the training, some students did not yet understand the standards of appearance and professional work behavior. After the training, students demonstrated a greater understanding of the importance of appearance, body language, and work attitude in representing the organization. This aligns with the concept of modern secretarial competency, which emphasizes not only technical skills but also integrity and professionalism.

In the context of business communication, simulation activities such as telephone handling, guest service, and public speaking directly increase students' self-confidence (Indriany et al., 2025; Malayati et al., 2025). Through role-play, students not only understand formal communication theory but also experience firsthand the professional pressure and demands (Joy & Kolb, 2009; Kolb, 2014). These results indicate that the simulation approach is effective in improving students' interpersonal communication skills and courage in facing real work situations.

In terms of digital literacy, the introduction and practice of Google Workspace, along with the concept of a paperless office, provide students with a new understanding of the transformation of modern office administration (Addini et al., 2025; Arifin et al., 2026; Kusuma, 2021). Most students previously relied on offline applications like Microsoft Office without understanding cloud-based collaboration. After the activity, students began to grasp the concepts of digital archiving, cloud-based document management, and the management of work schedules using digital applications. This demonstrates an increased adaptation to modern work technologies, a key requirement of today's industry (Sima et al., 2020; Vizjak et al., 2024).



The experiential learning approach was relevant to the needs of Grade XII MBSD students because it allowed them to learn through direct practice rather than through theoretical explanation alone. The role-play and simulation activities encouraged students to experience workplace-like situations, such as handling telephone calls, serving guests, preparing CVs, and responding to interview questions. This finding is consistent with experiential learning theory, which emphasizes that learning becomes more meaningful when participants are actively involved in concrete experience, reflection, and practical application.

The peer mentoring model also contributed to the learning process. The involvement of Diploma 3 Secretary students as mentors created a more accessible interaction between facilitators and participants. This condition helped students ask questions, practice skills, and receive direct feedback in a less rigid learning environment. In the context of vocational education, this model is useful because students need not only knowledge transfer but also exposure to professional attitudes and workplace communication habits.

Compared with similar community service activities in vocational education, this program confirms that practice-based training can strengthen students' work readiness when the materials are closely related to industry needs. Training in professional grooming, business communication, digital administration, and interview preparation provides students with competencies that are directly applicable to secretarial and office administration work. Therefore, collaboration between higher education institutions and vocational schools can become an effective strategy to bridge the gap between school-based learning and workplace expectations.

This activity has several limitations. First, the evaluation did not use pre-test and post-test instruments, so the program could not measure statistical improvement in student competency. Second, participant feedback was analyzed descriptively, so the results mainly describe students' responses and observed performance during the activity. Third, the activity was conducted in a limited duration and involved one group of Grade XII MBSD students at one school. Future community service programs should include structured pre-test and post-test instruments, participant satisfaction questionnaires, and follow-up evaluation to measure the sustainability of students' competency development.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the implementation of the community service program, it can be concluded that the activity supported the improvement of Grade XII MBSD students' professional secretarial competence at SMK Negeri 7 Medan. The program helped students strengthen their understanding of professional ethics and appearance standards, practice business communication through telephone handling, guest service, and public speaking simulations, develop basic digital office literacy through

Google Workspace practice, and improve job readiness through CV preparation and interview simulation. These results indicate that experiential learning combined with peer mentoring can provide practical learning experiences that are relevant to students' preparation for secretarial and office administration work.

For future community service programs, it is recommended that the evaluation process include more structured measurement instruments, such as pre-test and post-test, practical performance rubrics, participant satisfaction questionnaires, and follow-up assessments. Long-term impact measurement is also needed to examine whether the competencies gained during the training are sustained and applied by students in school-based learning, internships, or actual workplace settings. Future programs may also involve industry partners so that students receive broader exposure to current workplace standards and recruitment expectations.

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