

ANALYSIS OF RHETORICAL SPEAKING ABILITY OF STUDENTS AT SMK MUHAMMADIYAH RAPPANG

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

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Rhetorical speaking is an important competence for vocational high school students because it supports the ability to convey ideas systematically, logically, persuasively, and communicatively in classroom and professional-oriented communication. This study aims to describe the rhetorical speaking ability of students at SMK Muhammadiyah Rappang. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The research subjects were 20 students selected purposively after participating in classroom presentation activities. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The assessment covered mastery of material, organization of delivery, use of Indonesian, articulation, intonation, eye contact, expression and gestures, ethos, pathos, logos, and the ability to answer questions. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while credibility was strengthened through source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that students' rhetorical speaking ability is generally in the good category. Stronger aspects include mastery of material, organization, language use, articulation, eye contact, ethos, logos, and responding to questions. Intonation, expression and gestures, and pathos were categorized as adequate and still require strengthening. The main challenges were nervousness, monotonous intonation, limited body-language variation, and arguments that were not always supported by relevant evidence. Continuous practice through presentations, discussions, debates, simulations, and structured feedback is therefore recommended to improve students' rhetorical speaking competence.

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking ability is one of the essential language skills in the learning process because speaking enables students to express ideas, explain information, defend opinions, and build interactions with others. In vocational high school settings, this skill is used not only when students participate in classroom discussions or presentations but also as part of developing communication competence needed for practical activities, organizational involvement, and interactions oriented toward the world of work. Therefore, students need to speak clearly, coherently, politely, and convincingly.

Rhetorical speaking goes beyond fluently pronouncing words. Rhetoric requires speakers to organize ideas systematically, choose appropriate language, adjust intonation, manage facial expressions and body language, and build connections with the audience. In classical rhetoric, successful delivery is also influenced by ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos concerns the speaker's credibility, pathos concerns the ability to create emotional engagement with the audience, and logos concerns sound reasoning and the strength of arguments (Aristotle, 2007). These three elements complement one another and help speakers communicate messages more persuasively.

In classroom learning, presentations are one of the situations in which students' rhetorical speaking ability can be observed directly. Students need to master the material, organize the delivery from opening to closing, use communicative Indonesian, and respond to questions from the teacher or classmates. When these aspects are not sufficiently developed, presentations may become monotonous, overly dependent on written text, or unable to maintain audience attention. Public speaking anxiety may also affect performance through an unstable voice, excessive pauses, or repeated use of filler words (Arif et al., 2024; Lilis et al., 2024).

Preliminary observations underlying this study indicated that students' ability to speak in front of the class was not yet evenly developed. Some students were able to explain the material well, maintain eye contact, and respond to questions relevantly. Others, however, still showed nervousness, relatively flat intonation, limited body movement, and arguments that were not always supported by sufficient evidence or examples. This condition highlights the need for an analysis that does not examine speaking ability only in general terms but also integrates verbal, nonverbal, and classical rhetorical elements.

Previous studies of speaking ability have shown that speaking practice, two-way conversation strategies, and presentation activities can support improvements in the performance of both school and university students (Juliana & Anggraini, 2024; Paksi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, studies that portray the rhetorical speaking ability of vocational high school students by integrating mastery of material, organization of delivery, language use, articulation, intonation, nonverbal communication, and ethos, pathos, and logos still need to be strengthened. Such an analysis is important so that teachers can obtain a more comprehensive picture of students' strengths and the aspects that need further development in speaking instruction.

The novelty of this study lies in its analytical focus on the rhetorical speaking ability of students at SMK Muhammadiyah Rappang through indicators that combine content, language, delivery, nonverbal communication, and classical rhetoric. The study did not apply an experimental treatment; instead, it described abilities that emerged naturally when students gave presentations and interacted in the classroom. Based on this background, the study aimed to

describe the rhetorical speaking ability of students at SMK Muhammadiyah Rappang and to identify the aspects that had developed well and those that still required strengthening.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rhetorical Speaking Ability

Rhetorical speaking ability can be understood as the ability to convey ideas orally using a clear structure, appropriate language, logical reasons, and a delivery style capable of sustaining audience attention. Appropriate diction and language style affect message clarity because speakers need to adjust words, sentences, and delivery style to the purpose and situation of communication (Keraf, 2021). In Indonesian language learning, linguistic accuracy is also related to the ability to use language elements effectively so that the message does not create ambiguity (Chaer, 2021).

Speaking quality is determined not only by the content of the material but also by delivery techniques. Clear articulation helps the audience understand the message, while varied intonation makes the explanation more engaging and emphasizes important points. Eye contact, facial expressions, posture, and hand gestures are nonverbal elements that can reinforce meaning. Thus, rhetorical speaking ability is an integration of content mastery, language use, vocal delivery, and nonverbal behavior.

Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

Aristotle's rhetorical framework positions ethos, pathos, and logos as three important elements of persuasion (Aristotle, 2007). Ethos emerges when a speaker demonstrates preparedness, mastery of the material, confidence, and behavior that leads the audience to perceive the speaker as credible. Pathos concerns how a speaker builds rapport and an emotional response from the audience, for example through relatable examples, questions, relevant humor, or vocal emphasis. Logos concerns the logic of the delivery, the relationships among ideas, and the use of reasons, examples, data, or evidence to support statements.

In presentation-based learning, these three elements can be observed in practical ways. Students who master the material and appear convincing demonstrate ethos. Students who can involve the audience and adapt their delivery to the situation demonstrate pathos. Meanwhile, students who organize explanations coherently and provide relevant reasons demonstrate logos. Assessment that combines these three elements enables speaking ability to be understood more comprehensively.

Speaking Practice and Anxiety Management

Speaking ability develops through repeated opportunities to practice, feedback, and experience in facing an audience. Research on two-way conversation strategies shows the importance of active interaction in improving speaking performance (Juliana & Anggraini, 2024). Meanwhile, media-based strategies and communicative activities can also help learners organize messages and improve their speaking experience (Paksi et al., 2024). In this process, anxiety management is important because nervousness may reduce fluency, vocal stability, and self-confidence (Arif et al., 2024; Lilis et al., 2024).

Based on this review, rhetorical speaking ability in the present study is understood as an integrated competence comprising mastery of material, organization of delivery, use of

Indonesian, articulation, intonation, eye contact, facial expressions and gestures, ethos, pathos, logos, and the ability to answer questions. This framework was used to observe students' abilities during classroom presentations.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to obtain an in-depth description of students' rhetorical speaking ability as it naturally appeared during classroom presentation activities without applying any experimental treatment. The descriptive method was used to organize findings according to speaking-ability indicators so that students' strengths and weaknesses could be explained systematically (Sugiyono, 2022).

Research Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at SMK Muhammadiyah Rappang, Sidenreng Rappang Regency, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The research participants consisted of 20 students selected through purposive sampling. Participant selection considered students' involvement in classroom presentation activities so that their rhetorical speaking ability could be observed directly. The object of the study was students' rhetorical speaking ability in presenting material and interacting with the classroom audience.

Research Indicators and Instruments

Rhetorical speaking ability was analyzed through indicators of mastery of material, organization of delivery, use of Indonesian, articulation, intonation, eye contact, facial expressions and gestures, the application of ethos, pathos, and logos, and the ability to answer questions. The researcher served as the main research instrument, while supporting instruments consisted of an observation sheet, a semi-structured interview guide, and documentation. The observation sheet was prepared according to the assessed indicators, while interviews were used to explore students' experiences, perceived difficulties when speaking, and efforts made to improve their abilities.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted while students gave classroom presentations. Semi-structured interviews were carried out after the presentation activities to obtain explanations concerning self-confidence, mastery of material, and delivery difficulties. Documentation was used to complement the data through activity photographs, assessment notes, presentation materials, teaching modules or other relevant instructional documents, and activity recordings when available.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Observation and interview data were grouped according to the research indicators and then presented in descriptive accounts and categorical summaries. Data credibility was maintained through source triangulation and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Observations of 20 students showed that the rhetorical speaking ability of students at SMK Muhammadiyah Rappang was generally in the good category. Students demonstrated relatively strong ability in mastery of material, organization of delivery, use of Indonesian, articulation, eye contact, ethos, logos, and the ability to answer questions. Meanwhile, intonation, facial expressions and gestures, and pathos remained in the adequate category and therefore required more focused practice. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 1.

Assessed Aspect	Category
Mastery of material	Good
Organization of delivery	Good
Use of Indonesian	Good
Articulation	Good
Intonation	Adequate
Eye contact	Good
Facial expressions and gestures	Adequate
Application of ethos	Good
Application of pathos	Adequate
Application of logos	Good
Ability to answer questions	Good

Table 1. Summary of Students' Rhetorical Speaking Ability

Mastery of Material and Organization of Delivery

Most students demonstrated good mastery of the material. This was evident in their ability to explain the topic in their own words, provide appropriate examples, and respond to questions related to the material. Mastery of the content increased students' confidence and reduced dependence on written text. Nevertheless, several students still looked at slides or notes too frequently, which reduced communication with the audience. This condition indicates that content mastery needs to be continuously strengthened so that students can explain ideas more spontaneously without losing accuracy.

In terms of organization of delivery, most students were able to structure their presentations from the opening and development of the content to the closing. A coherent structure helped the audience follow the explanation. One weakness that remained visible was the transition between topics, which sometimes occurred without transitional sentences. As a result, the relationship between sections of the material did not always feel smooth. Teachers can strengthen this aspect by encouraging students to prepare presentation outlines and transition markers before presenting.

Language Use, Articulation, and Intonation

Students' use of Indonesian was generally in the good category. The sentences they used were relatively communicative and understandable to the audience. Some students still used nonstandard words, repeated words, or filler expressions while searching for the next idea. Accuracy in word choice should therefore continue to be developed so that students can communicate messages effectively and appropriately in formal classroom situations.

Students' articulation was categorized as good because most words could be heard clearly. Intonation, however, was one of the aspects that still required strengthening. Some students spoke in a relatively flat tone and gave insufficient emphasis to important information. When nervous, several students also increased their speaking rate, making parts of the explanation less clear. Oral reading practice, presentation simulations, and recording-based evaluation can be used to help students recognize their vocal patterns and improve intonation variation.

Eye Contact, Facial Expressions, and Gestures

Eye contact was in the good category. Most students tried to look at the audience and did not focus continuously on their slides. This eye contact helped create the impression that students were genuinely communicating with listeners. Nevertheless, facial expressions and gestures remained in the adequate category. Some students stood rigidly or used very limited hand movements, while others made repetitive movements that did not always support the message. Body language should be used naturally so that it reinforces information rather than becoming a distraction.

Application of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

The application of ethos was in the good category. Most students demonstrated preparedness, politeness, and sufficient control of the presentation situation, creating an impression of credibility. However, some students still showed signs of nervousness, such as speaking hesitantly, looking down, or repeatedly using filler words. This indicates that credibility is shaped not only by knowledge but also by mental readiness and consistent behavior while speaking.

The application of pathos was in the adequate category. Students attempted to involve the audience through simple questions, examples related to everyday life, and occasional light humor. However, interaction was not carried out consistently, so several presentations remained one-way. The ability to build rapport with the audience should be strengthened through practice in opening presentations with attention-getters, using contextual examples, and providing opportunities for listeners to respond.

The application of logos was categorized as good. Most students were able to present ideas logically and explain relationships among the main points. Nevertheless, some arguments remained general and were not supported by data, strong examples, or relevant sources. Strengthening source literacy will help students provide more accountable reasons and increase the persuasive power of their speaking.

Ability to Answer Questions

The ability to answer questions was in the good category. Most students were able to understand questions and provide answers relevant to the material. They could also re-explain parts that the audience had not understood. Several students still needed considerable time when responding to analytical questions or questions requiring deeper reasoning. This finding indicates the importance of question-and-answer practice that not only tests recall but also encourages students to think and formulate arguments spontaneously.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that students at SMK Muhammadiyah Rappang have developed a good foundation of rhetorical speaking ability. The most prominent aspects were mastery of material, organization of delivery, language use, articulation, eye contact, ethos, logos, and the ability to answer questions. This pattern indicates that most students are already able to deliver information in a structure that the audience can follow. These strengths provide an important foundation for developing more persuasive and adaptive communication abilities.

From the perspective of Aristotelian rhetoric, the findings show that ethos and logos were relatively more developed than pathos. Ethos was reflected in students' preparedness and attitude when presenting, while logos appeared in the relatively logical flow of their explanations. Pathos still required strengthening because audience involvement was not always built actively. This finding confirms that effective speaking cannot rely solely on mastery of content but also requires the ability to read the situation and create a connection with listeners (Aristotle, 2007).

Weaknesses in intonation variation, facial expressions, gestures, and nervousness management indicate the importance of performance-based practice. Speaking anxiety can affect delivery stability and self-confidence; therefore, gradual habituation to presenting before small groups and whole classes is necessary (Arif et al., 2024; Lilis et al., 2024). Practice should be accompanied by specific feedback on aspects such as pace, volume, eye contact, body position, filler-word use, and clarity of argumentative structure.

The findings also support the importance of learning activities that provide opportunities for two-way interaction. Conversation strategies and speaking activities involving responses among participants can help students develop fluency and confidence (Juliana & Anggraini, 2024). In addition, media-based activities such as podcasts or presentation recordings can be used as reflective tools because students can listen again to the quality of their articulation, intonation, and delivery structure (Paksi et al., 2024). Such media do not need to replace live presentations but can serve as supporting practice before students speak before an audience.

Evidence-based argumentation also requires attention. In the logos aspect, students were able to present logical reasons, but not all of them used relevant data or sources. Teachers can integrate activities involving information seeking, source-reliability assessment, and the citation of simple evidence into presentation assignments. In this way, speaking instruction not only develops the courage to present but also builds the habit of expressing opinions responsibly.

Pedagogically, the findings point to the need for rhetorical speaking instruction that is practice-oriented, reflective, and continuous. Individual and group presentations can be combined with discussions, debates, interview simulations, master-of-ceremony activities, product promotion, or other communication situations relevant to vocational education. After each activity, teachers can provide feedback rubrics covering content, language, voice, nonverbal communication, ethos, pathos, and logos. This form of practice gives students opportunities to improve their abilities progressively.

Thus, students' rhetorical speaking ability has developed well but still needs strengthening in intonation, nonverbal communication, audience engagement, nervousness management, and evidence-based argumentation. The findings can serve as evaluation material for teachers in designing speaking instruction that assesses not only presentation content but also delivery quality and the communicative relationship between speaker and audience.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the rhetorical speaking ability of students at SMK Muhammadiyah Rappang was generally in the good category. Students were able to master the material, organize their delivery, use communicative Indonesian, articulate words clearly enough, maintain eye contact, demonstrate ethos and logos, and answer questions relevantly. These abilities indicate that the students already have an adequate foundation for conveying ideas systematically and in ways that can be understood by an audience.

Nevertheless, several aspects still require strengthening, particularly intonation variation, facial expressions and gestures, the ability to build rapport with the audience through pathos, nervousness management, and the use of evidence to strengthen arguments. Therefore, rhetorical speaking instruction should provide repeated practice through presentations, discussions, debates, communication simulations, performance recordings, and structured feedback. These findings can be used as evaluation material to develop speaking instruction that is more practical and relevant to the communication needs of vocational high school students.

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