Improving Speaking Confidence and Delivery Performance through Toastmasters-Based Evaluation Sessions: A Case Study of English Literature Students

Meningkatkan Kepercayaan Diri Berbicara dan Kinerja Penyampaian Melalui Sesi Evaluasi Berbasis Toastmasters: Studi Kasus Mahasiswa Sastra Inggris

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini berawal dari permasalahan rendahnya kepercayaan diri dan performa berbicara di depan umum di kalangan mahasiswa Sastra Inggris, yang seringkali dipicu oleh sistem penilaian numerik yang kaku. Studi kasus kualitatif ini dilakukan di Universitas Negeri Medan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas penerapan sesi evaluasi berbasis Toastmasters sebagai model penilaian alternatif. Melalui observasi langsung dan kuesioner terstruktur, temuan menunjukkan bahwa siklus umpan balik sistematis mampu meningkatkan aspek psikologis dan teknis mahasiswa secara bersamaan. Data menunjukkan bahwa 70% responden merasa lebih tenang dan percaya diri karena lingkungan evaluasi yang suportif. Secara teknis, terdapat peningkatan signifikan dalam kontak mata dan pengurangan kata-kata pengisi sebesar 86,7%, di mana semua peserta (100%) setuju bahwa umpan balik sistematis jauh lebih efektif daripada penilaian numerik tradisional. Keunikan penelitian ini terletak pada transisi menuju model "mikro-evaluatif" yang memberdayakan mahasiswa untuk mengambil peran spesifik seperti Ah-Counter dan Timer untuk mengembangkan kesadaran teknis yang lebih dalam. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi umpan balik rekan sejawat yang terstruktur merupakan faktor kunci dalam menjembatani kesenjangan antara pengetahuan linguistik teoritis dan kompetensi komunikasi profesional.

Kata kunci: Berbicara di depan umum, Toastmasters, evaluasi rekan sejawat

Abstract

This research originates from the problem of low confidence and public speaking performance among English Literature students, which is often triggered by a rigid numerical assessment system. This qualitative case study was conducted at Universitas Negeri Medan to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing Toastmasters-based evaluation sessions as an alternative assessment model. Through direct observation and structured questionnaires, the findings show that systematic feedback loops are able to improve both the psychological and technical aspects of students simultaneously. The data indicate that 70% of respondents felt calmer and more confident due to the supportive evaluation environment. Technically, there was a significant improvement in eye contact and a reduction of filler words by 86.7%, where all participants (100%) agreed that systematic feedback was far more effective than traditional numerical grading. The uniqueness of this research lies in the transition toward a "micro-evaluative" model that empowers students to take on specific roles such as Ah-Counter and Timer to develop deeper technical awareness. The study concludes that the integration of structured peer feedback is a key factor in bridging the gap between theoretical linguistic knowledge and professional communication competence.

Keywords: Public speaking, Toastmasters, peer evaluation

INTRODUCTION

In the era of highly competitive global communication, public speaking has transformed from merely an additional skill into a core competency that determines the professional competitiveness of English Literature graduates. As prospective cross-cultural communicators, students are required not only to master linguistic structures theoretically but also to be able to deliver complex ideas persuasively and articulately (Lucas, 2015). The relevance of this skill has become increasingly crucial considering today's labor market demands, which strongly emphasize career sustainability or employability skills (Hartati et al., 2022). As explained by King (2002), oral communication ability is a primary predictor of professional success in both university settings and the workplace. The inability to communicate ideas effectively may hinder career opportunities and reduce graduates' competitiveness. Therefore, mastering public speaking must become a priority in higher education curricula to produce graduates who are prepared to face the challenges of modern industry.

The gap between grammatical knowledge and actual speaking practice often manifests in low speaking confidence. Psychologically, many students experience foreign language speaking anxiety, which results in a loss of focus when they are under audience pressure. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as Communication Apprehension, a condition in which individuals feel fear or reluctance to communicate orally in certain contexts (McCroskey, 1984). This issue is closely related to students' emotional intelligence in managing nervousness, which directly affects their performance in public speaking situations (Rifah & Sabilah, 2022). Without emotional regulation and a supportive environment, these psychological barriers will continue to suppress students' communicative potential, even if they possess adequate vocabulary mastery.

In addition to mental barriers, technical aspects or delivery performance also constitute significant obstacles that are often overlooked in independent learning processes. Poor delivery quality is characterized by inconsistent eye contact, unstable voice volume, and rigid body language. These technical issues are further aggravated by the high frequency of filler words (such as "ah," "um," "e"), which disrupt the fluency of the message. As analyzed in Lailatul Rifah's study (2022), excessive use of filler words often reflects mental unpreparedness or a lack of vocal awareness during speaking. High dependency on scripts also hinders the creation of organic interaction with the audience, causing the message to sound monotonous and fail to achieve its persuasive purpose, as required by effective public speaking standards (Lucas, 2015).

One of the fundamental factors contributing to the slow development of students' speaking abilities is the unstructured feedback mechanism in conventional learning environments. In many classrooms, evaluation tends to be summative or merely oriented toward final grades and is often subjective from a single instructor's perspective. In line with the principles presented in the Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation, a skill development program requires an objective, systematic evaluation system capable of continuous performance monitoring (Wholey, 2010 in Newcomer et al., 2015). Without evaluation instruments that can analyze speaking components at a micro level, students will struggle to obtain actionable recommendations for self-improvement. The absence of concrete performance data leads students to repeat the same error patterns without measurable progress from one session to the next.

As an effort to bridge this evaluation gap, Toastmasters International offers a dynamic peer evaluation model within a safe and supportive environment. The strength of this method lies in its highly specific evaluative roles, namely the Grammarian for linguistic aspects, the Timer for time discipline, and the Ah-Counter for eliminating vocal distractions (Rifah & Sabilah, 2022). This model creates a learning ecosystem in which each student receives detailed and immediate feedback. Furthermore, active student involvement as evaluators fosters the development of active listening skills and professional maturity in navigating criticism. Thus, this method not only improves delivery techniques but also builds the mental resilience required in broader professional communication contexts.

Although several studies have discussed the Toastmasters method, there remains an urgency to specifically explore the effectiveness of evaluation sessions in improving both confidence and technical performance among English Literature students at Universitas Negeri Medan. This study aims to fill this gap by integrating systematic program evaluation principles from Newcomer et al. (2015) into a modified peer evaluation practice inspired by Toastmasters, adapted to the local context (Hartati et al., 2022). Through this case study, it is expected to provide empirical evidence that transforming the evaluation mechanism from a teacher-centered approach to a structured peer-based evaluation can serve as a key factor in enhancing students' communication skills.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore in depth the phenomenon of speaking skill development through a structured evaluation session intervention. The case study design was selected due to its capacity to investigate contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted in the English Literature Study Program at Universitas Negeri Medan, involving participants selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in advanced speaking courses. As suggested by Creswell (2014), this qualitative approach enables researchers to capture the complexity of student interactions and the dynamics of peer feedback that naturally occur in the classroom.

The intervention in this study was carried out through the adaptation of the official protocol of Toastmasters International (2011), designed as a continuous evaluation cycle. This procedure focused not only on the speaker's performance but also on a structured performance monitoring system through specific evaluative roles. In line with a systematic program evaluation model, each student performance session was broken down into micro-level data through three primary roles: the Grammarian, who monitored linguistic accuracy; the Timer, who supervised time management; and the Ah-Counter, who recorded vocal disruptions or filler words (Rifah & Sabilah, 2022). The use of these roles aimed to transform generally broad criticism into actionable recommendations that students could immediately implement in subsequent sessions, consistent with the principles of formative evaluation proposed by Newcomer et al. (2015).

To ensure data validity through a triangulation strategy, the researcher employed three complementary data collection instruments (Creswell, 2014). First, a Structured Questionnaire was distributed to all participants using a Likert Scale to measure their self-perception of improvement in Speaking Confidence. Second, Participatory Observation was conducted to record changes in students' technical behavior in Delivery Performance, such as eye contact and vocal variation, using

a validated observation checklist. Third, documentation in the form of video recordings and evaluators' report notes was collected as primary data. This technique aligns with the concept of Performance Monitoring, which emphasizes the importance of evidence-based data collection to assess the effectiveness of a development program (Wholey (2010) in Newcomer et al. (2015)).

The collected data were analyzed using an interactive analysis technique consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Qualitative data from observations and documentation were coded based on major themes such as "Reduction of Vocal Disruptions" and "Interpersonal Maturity." Meanwhile, questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively to identify trends in participants' confidence improvement. The researcher synchronized questionnaire findings with concrete evidence from video recordings to ensure that students' self-reports aligned with their observable performance improvements. This analytical process ensured that the conclusions drawn were grounded in strong empirical evidence, in accordance with objective program evaluation standards (Newcomer et al., 2015).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study employed a data triangulation technique to ensure the validity of the findings, combining results from perception questionnaires, real-time direct evaluation observations, and video documentation analysis. This section presents the primary data obtained through a structured questionnaire administered to 30 English Literature students at Universitas Negeri Medan. The data analysis focuses on two main variables: Speaking Confidence (psychological aspect) and Delivery Performance (technical aspect) following the implementation of structured evaluation sessions modeled after Toastmasters.
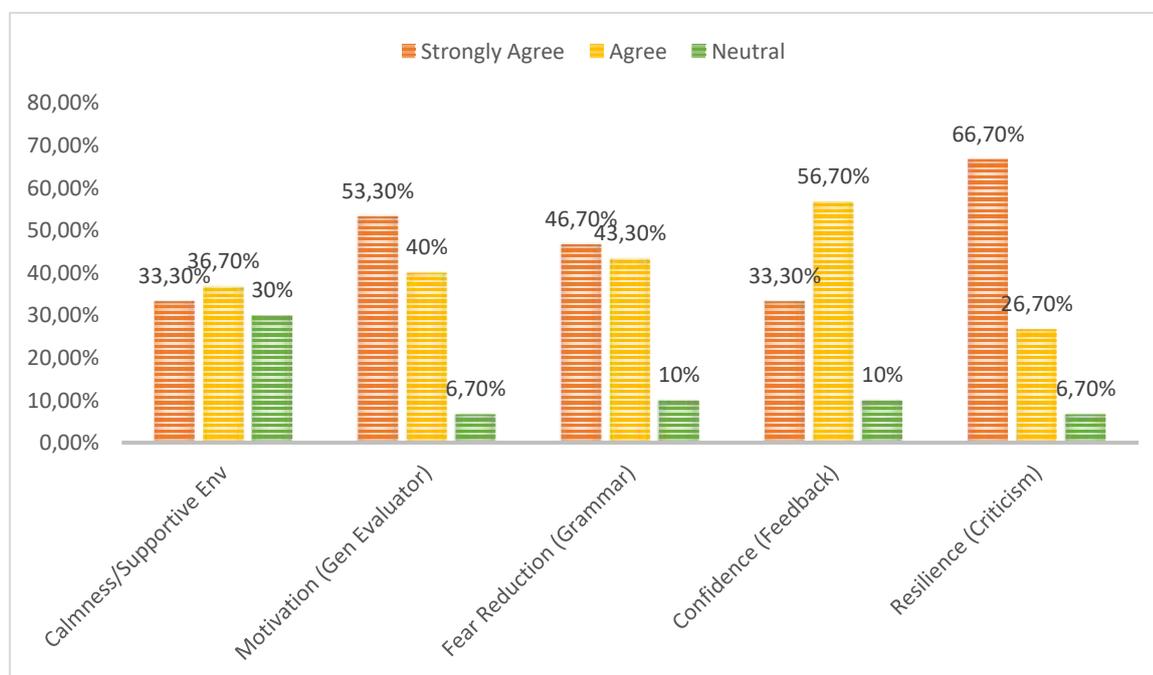

Figure 1. Speaking Confidence (Psychological Aspects)

Figure 1 illustrates students' perceptions of speaking confidence after the implementation of Toastmasters-based evaluation sessions. The majority of responses fall into the Strongly Agree and

Agree categories, indicating that the supportive evaluation environment significantly reduced students' speaking anxiety and improved their confidence.
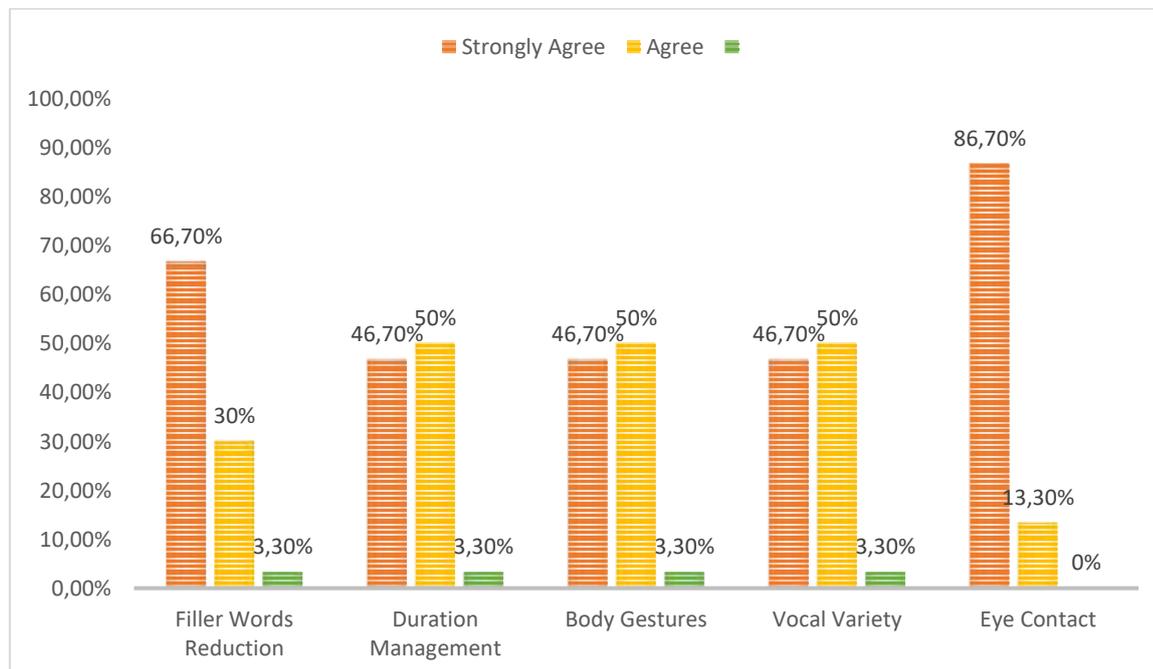

Figure 2. Delivery Performance (Technical Aspects)

Figure 2 presents students' perceptions of delivery performance. The results show very high levels of agreement, particularly in the indicators of maintaining eye contact (86.7%) and the effectiveness of systematic feedback (90%). These findings suggest that structured evaluation sessions effectively improved students' technical speaking performance.

1. Analysis of Speaking Confidence (Psychological Aspect)

Figure 1 illustrates students' perceptions of speaking confidence after the implementation of Toastmasters-based evaluation sessions. The majority of responses fall into the Strongly Agree and Agree categories, indicating that a supportive evaluation mechanism significantly reduced students' speaking anxiety. As many as 70% of respondents reported feeling calmer due to the constructive evaluation format. This finding is reinforced by video documentation data showing a clear behavioral transition; during the initial sessions, students tended to display tense body gestures and rigid facial expressions, whereas in the final sessions after the intervention, they appeared with more relaxed and open postures.

Furthermore, the presence of the General Evaluator role triggered positive motivation in 93.3% of participants (Figure 3). This aligns with the researcher's direct observation notes, which indicate that students were more actively taking notes on improvement suggestions and demonstrated greater enthusiasm to perform again compared to before the method was implemented. This reduction in psychological barriers confirms that a safe and supportive environment is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of communication competence.

2. Knowing that there is a General Evaluator motivates me to perform at my best rather than making me feel pressured.
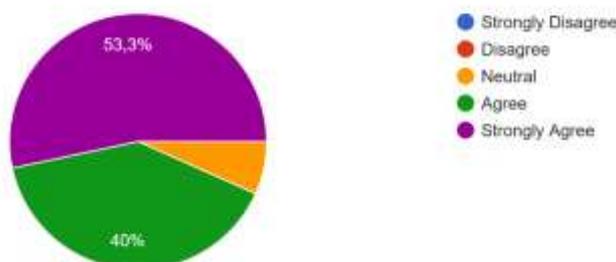30 jawaban

Figure 3. Motivational Impact of the General Evaluator Role

2. Analysis of Delivery Performance (Technical Aspect)

In the technical dimension, performance improvements were clearly recorded through direct evaluation sheets completed by specific roles. The Ah-Counter role was acknowledged by 96.7% of respondents as highly helpful in detecting the use of filler words (Figure 4). Real-time observation data showed a drastic decrease in vocal disruptions, from an average of 12–15 filler words per minute during the first performance to only 2–3 words in the final performance.

Improvements in time management and body language were also validated through documentation analysis. Video recordings confirmed that students who were previously dependent on scripts (86.7% stated in the questionnaire that they were now more aware of maintaining eye contact) consistently engaged in visual interaction with the audience (Figure 5). The synchronization between students' perceptions (questionnaire data) and observable evidence in the videos (documentation) demonstrates that their technical awareness had significantly improved.

1. The role of the Ah-Counter helps me become more aware of reducing filler words (such as "ah," "um," "uh," "so") during my speech.
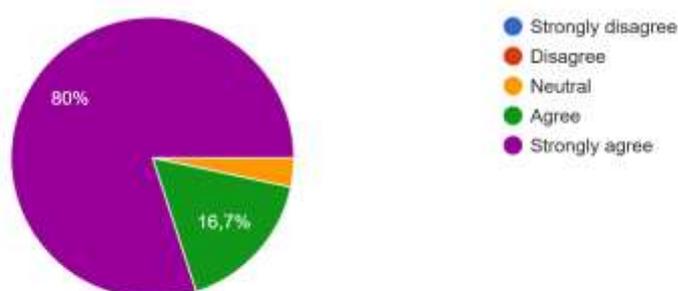30 jawaban

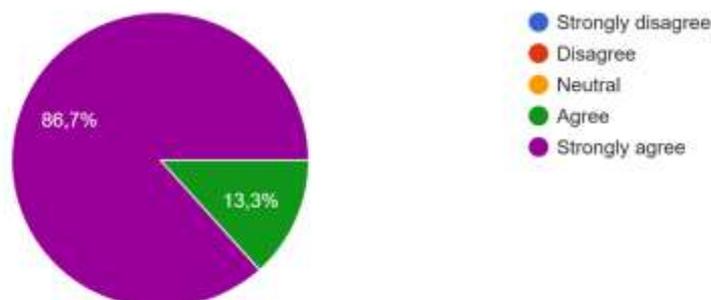Figure 4. Effectiveness of the Ah-Counter in Reducing Filler Words

Figure 5. Consistency in Maintaining Eye Contact with the Audience

3. Discussion: The Power of Systematic Feedback over Numerical Grades

The most important finding of this study is the absolute consensus (100% of respondents) stating that systematic feedback is far more effective than merely receiving numerical grades (Figure 6). Through data triangulation, it became evident that numerical scores alone are unable to provide in-depth technical improvement guidance comparable to that offered by the roles of Grammarian, Timer, and Ah-Counter.
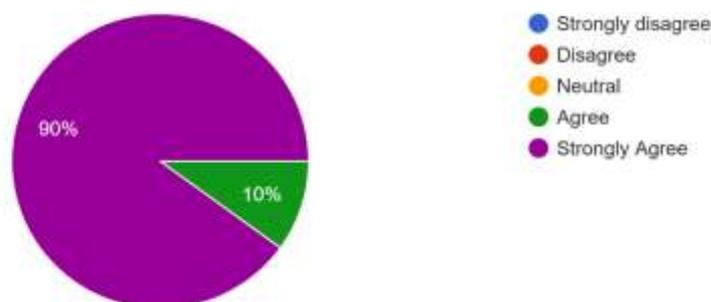

Figure 6. Comparison of the Effectiveness of Systematic Feedback vs. Numerical Scores

In line with the theory of Newcomer et al. (2015) discussed in the CBR, effective evaluation must be formative in nature and produce actionable recommendations. This is further supported by Hartati, Meisuri, and Ginting (2022) who demonstrated that the International Toastmaster evaluation guide strategy is effective in improving public speaking competence through structured assessment. Moreover, a modified Toastmaster approach in academic settings has been proven to create a more dynamic and measurable learning atmosphere compared to conventional methods (Hartati et al., 2022). This technical awareness is also highlighted in recent studies concerning

educational frameworks that emphasize continuous feedback to enhance student performance (Sari et al., 2024).

Therefore, the synchronization between what students felt (questionnaire) and what was captured on video (documentation) proves that their technical awareness has increased significantly."

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of Toastmasters-based evaluation sessions effectively bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and students' practical competence. The results indicate significant improvements in two primary variables: speaking confidence and delivery performance. Psychologically, it was found that students' speaking confidence increased drastically, with 70% of respondents reporting greater calmness due to the supportive evaluation environment. Simultaneously, students' delivery performance also showed rapid technical progress, particularly in eye contact and the reduction of filler words, reaching an 86.7% success rate. Through the transition from traditional numerical grading to a "micro-evaluative" model, students gained not only grades but also the technical awareness necessary for professional communication. Therefore, the integration of structured peer feedback is highly recommended to enhance the quality of speaking instruction at the university level.

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