

THE IMPACTS OF DICTION MASTERY AND RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES ON STUDENTS' SPEECH WRITING: A CASE STUDY AT SMK NEGERI 3 LHOKSEUMAWE

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges faced by high school students at SMK Negeri 3 Lhokseumawe in using diction and rhetorical techniques in speech writing. Despite the significance of these skills for persuasive communication, many students encountered difficulties. A qualitative case study was conducted with 10 students from grade X, employing semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The study identified five challenges: limited vocabulary, difficulty applying rhetorical techniques, lack of exposure to effective speech samples, fear of experimenting with advanced language, and insufficient feedback on language use. The findings emphasize the need for targeted instructional strategies, including vocabulary-building activities, explicit teaching of rhetorical techniques, and more personalized feedback. This research underscore the importance of enhancing diction and rhetorical skills in vocational schools, where the focus is often on functional communication rather than expressive language use. The study offers valuable insights for teachers seeking to improve speech writing instruction in vocational contexts, providing a foundation for future pedagogical interventions aimed at addressing these challenges and fostering more effective communication skills among students.

Keywords: *Diction, Rhetorical techniques, Speech writing, Vocational education*

INTRODUCTION

In language education, speech writing is one of crucial skills that allows students to successfully articulate their ideas, persuade an audience, and engage listeners with well-structured arguments. A good speech is based not only on good ideas, but also on mastery of diction (word choice) and rhetorical techniques. Diction mastery enables students to select accurate, expressive, and contextually suitable words, whereas rhetorical techniques employ strategies like repetition, parallelism, and figurative language to make speeches more convincing and engaging (Makuta, 2025). Despite the importance of these components, many high school students struggle to properly incorporate them into their speech writing (Nurcaya et al, 2023; Nurmawati & Sitti Aminah, 2023).

One of the most significant challenges students experiences is limited vocabulary and lack of exposure to advanced diction, which limits their ability to convey ideas with clarity and nuance. Their speeches may appear imprecise, monotonous, or persuasive if they lack powerful word choice (Olindo & Basri, 2024). Furthermore, students frequently struggle to recognize and apply rhetorical methods, resulting in presentations with little engagement and persuasive appeal. Traditional writing teaching often prioritizes syntax and structure above expressive and stylistic qualities, leaving students with insufficient guidance on how to improve their language use in spoken writing (Mardhiah, et al, 2024; Novianti et al, 2024).

Furthermore, many students lack confidence when experimenting with diction and rhetorical techniques, afraid that their word choices may be unsuitable or ineffectual. Without controlled feedback and practice, high school students may struggle to find their own writing voice and rhetorical awareness. Teachers, on the other hand, may have difficulty in offering tailored instruction that helps students improve their diction and rhetorical skills while adhering to regular curricular requirements (Septiani et al, 2020). Given these issues, it is critical to investigate students' experiences and challenges with diction and rhetorical techniques in speech writing. This study aims to address the research question, "What challenges do high school students at SMK Negeri 3

Lhokseumawe face in using diction and rhetorical techniques in speech writing?" By analyzing students' opinions, challenges, and learning experiences, this study aims to provide educators with insights that will help them build more effective instructional strategies to improve speech writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech writing is an important part of language education because it helps students improve their communicative skills and overall language ability. Previous studies have stressed the importance of diction and rhetorical techniques in developing effective and persuasive speeches (Bilavych et al, 2022; Salih, 2021). Diction, or the selection of words, is critical to assuring clarity, precision, and persuasiveness in speech delivery. Similarly, rhetorical techniques, which include tactics like parallelism, repetition, and figurative language, increases a speech's impact and listener involvement (Makuta, 2025). This literature review investigates the impact of diction mastery and rhetorical techniques on high school speech writing, with a specific emphasis on the difficulties encountered by students at SMKN 3 Lhokseumawe, an Indonesian vocational high school. This study aims to fill in current research gaps and investigate instructional alternatives for increasing students' speech writing skills.

Diction mastery is a student's ability to choose precise, expressive, and contextually relevant words to improve the clarity and persuasiveness of their speech. Researchers have continually stressed the importance of diction in speech writing, claiming that excellent word choice is essential for developing appealing arguments and eliciting emotional responses (Winarni et al, 2021). According to Suseno (2024), students with a large vocabulary can convey sophisticated concepts and keep the audience's attention, whereas those with low lexical resources frequently struggle with unclear or repeated language.

In this case, Destira (2021) discover that students with a large vocabulary were better able to craft engaging speeches with diction that increased their credibility and argument strength. Students with restricted vocabulary, on the other hand, produced less convincing and effective speeches (Heilmann, Malone & Westerveld, 2020). While these studies provide useful insights, the majority of research has been conducted on ordinary high schools rather than vocational institutions such as SMKN 3 Lhokseumawe, where students may have varied linguistic exposure and language learning priorities. Thus, there is a need for conducting a study in this setting.

Besides, rhetorical techniques play a crucial role in making speeches more engaging and persuasive. It involves the strategic use of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, repetition, and parallelism to enhance the delivery and impact of a message (Makuta, 2025). According to Khajavi & Rasti (2020), rhetorical techniques not only make speeches more memorable but also help structure ideas in a way that resonates with audiences. These can be particularly powerful in strengthening arguments and reinforcing key messages.

However, many students, including those at SMKN 3 Lhokseumawe, struggle to use rhetorical techniques effectively. According to studies, students frequently lack proper exposure to rhetorical techniques and struggle to integrate them into their writing as a result of insufficient instructional focus (Novianti et al., 2024). Amalia (2022) suggests that while certain rhetorical methods are intuitive, others require explicit teaching and guided practice, especially for students who are unfamiliar with formal speech production. Although the relevance of rhetorical techniques has been acknowledged, there is a scarcity of study on how vocational high school students develop and apply rhetorical skills in speechwriting. Hence, investigating the specific rhetorical obstacles that students at SMKN 3 Lhokseumawe experience could provide valuable insights into how to effectively support their language development.

High school students, particularly those in vocational education, face problems in developing diction and argumentative techniques. One major challenge is a lack of exposure to advanced language use, both in writing and speaking. According to (Suseno, 2024), students with limited access to diversified vocabulary and rhetorical models are likely to create speech writing that lacks depth and persuasive force. This issue is especially important in vocational high schools in Indonesia, where language instruction frequently favors functional communication over stylistic expression.

Another challenge is students' reluctance to experiment with advanced diction and rhetorical techniques. Many students are hesitant to use sophisticated language or stylistic devices for concern that their choices may be ineffective or unsuitable (Erlangga & Pahamzah, 2024). This may impede their capacity to interact creatively with words, lowering the overall quality of their speech writing.

Furthermore, typical writing in Indonesian language class at schools emphasizes grammar and syntax over expressive language use (Novianti et al., 2024). While grammatical precision is important, a focus on structural correctness might result in technically sound but uninteresting speech writing. This instructional imbalance

indicates the need for more explicit pedagogical techniques that incorporate the teaching of diction and rhetorical techniques.

To address these challenges, teachers might use specific teaching strategies to improve diction and rhetorical techniques in speechwriting. One effective technique is to incorporate vocabulary-building tasks into the lessons, allowing students to broaden their lexical range and make more intentional word selections (Sholihah, 2020). Teachers can also expose students to rhetorical methods by using example speeches, textual analysis, and guided practice (Kharisma, 2022). Using famous speeches as case studies, students may examine how professional speakers use diction and rhetorical skills to engage their audience.

Moreover, providing organized feedback and revision opportunities is critical for enhancing students' diction and rhetorical techniques. Providing constructive feedback on speech drafts can help students improve their diction and improve their rhetorical techniques (Amalia et al, 2023; Kurniawati, 2022; Sari, 2024). Teachers should make specific suggestions for how students might improve their language skills, promoting gradual improvement that results in more polished and persuasive speeches.

While previous research investigated into diction and rhetorical techniques in speech writing, gaps still remain, particularly among vocational students. Most study has concentrated on general high schools, neglecting institutions such as SMKN 3 Lhokseumawe, where language requirements differ due to industry-specific communication. Furthermore, only a few studies have investigated how vocational students build rhetorical competence and use rhetorical strategies in speech writing. Given the particular linguistic and professional demands in vocational education, deeper research is needed for tailoring instructional techniques to this setting, thereby improving teaching practices and students' speech writing performance.

METHOD

A qualitative case study was conducted to investigate the challenges high school students at SMKN 3 Lhokseumawe experience while using diction and rhetorical techniques in speech writing. A case study method provides in-depth research for collecting data on students' experiences, problems, and perspectives in a real-life setting (Hamied, 2017).

The study involved 10 students from grade X at SMKN 3 Lhokseumawe. Purposive sampling was employed to choose students who had participated in speech writing activities so that they may provide relevant observations on their problems. To collect data, the study used semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews with students explored their experiences, diction and rhetorical challenges, and perceptions of teachers' instruction. Classroom observations were done to see how students used diction and rhetorical approaches in practice. Furthermore, document analysis of students' speech drafts was used to investigate patterns in diction use, rhetorical techniques, and reoccurring problems.

The collected data was then analyzed using thematic analysis, which revealed themes about students' challenges with diction and rhetorical techniques. These themes included limited vocabulary, difficulty using rhetorical strategies, a lack of exposure, and instructional gaps. Triangulation was used by comparing data from interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Finally, ethical concerns were thoroughly considered. Students, teachers, and school administrators provided informed consent to ensure confidentiality and participation. This qualitative case study provided extensive and contextually relevant insights into the specific challenges that students at SMKN 3 Lhokseumawe had when mastering diction and rhetorical skills in speech writing, with the aim of offering better practical teaching implications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Data from semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were used to provide a more comprehensive picture of the students' experiences. The findings of this study highlight several major challenges concerning the difficulties encountered by high school students at SMK Negeri 3 Lhokseumawe in applying diction and rhetorical techniques in speech writing. Here are the main findings based on the themes found in the data:

1. Limited Vocabulary and Word Choice

A major challenge noted across data sources was the students' limited vocabulary. Many students expressed difficulty finding suitable words to explain their views clearly and effectively. Semi-structured interviews found that students frequently felt limited in their speech writing because of a lack of vocabulary. Classroom

observations revealed that students tended to use basic language, limiting the effect of their remarks. This problem was also visible in the document analysis, as many speeches lacked the diversity and depth required to completely engage an audience. A student stated: *"I know the basic words, but I struggle to find stronger ones that would make my speech sound more interesting."*

2. Difficulty in Using Rhetorical Techniques

The students also had difficulty using rhetorical techniques including repetition, parallelism, and emotional appeal. While they were aware of these approaches, many face difficulties to apply them effectively in their writing. Interview replies revealed that students occasionally used these techniques improperly, resulting in a lack of coherence and persuasiveness in their speeches. Classroom observations are in line with these findings, with students hesitant to use rhetorical methods in their drafts. A student mentioned: *"I have learned about rhetorical techniques, but I am not sure how to use them naturally in my speech."*

3. Lack of Exposure to Effective Speech Models

The data also revealed an absence in access to high-quality speech examples. Classroom observations revealed that, while teachers did occasionally give examples, they were limited in variety and depth. This lack of experience hampered students' knowledge of how to use advanced language and rhetoric in their speeches. One student stated, *"We do not get to see examples of strong presentations, only short ones. I'm not sure how to construct a speech like the ones I see on television."*

4. Fear of experimenting with diction and rhetoric

Another significant finding was that many students were afraid of making mistakes while trying with advanced diction or rhetorical techniques. This anxiety hindered students from experimenting with new ways to language, resulting in more conventional and basic speech drafts. Semi-structured interviews demonstrated that students were anxious about using unknown terms, so they chose terminology that was safe. This fear also hampered their ability to be creative and take risks when crafting their speeches. A student commented: *"I am afraid if I use complicated words, I might use them wrong and people will not understand me."*

5. Insufficient feedback on language use

Students were frequently given feedback with a focus on structure and language rather than diction or rhetorical techniques. Both interviews and classroom observations revealed that students did not receive explicit, focused feedback on the use of advanced language or rhetorical methods. This lack of feedback further hampered students' skills to enhance their diction and rhetorical techniques. Teachers tended to prioritize the general order of the speech over the usefulness of the language itself. A student mentioned: *"Most of the feedback is about how I organize my speech, but not much about the words I use or how to make it sound better."*

These results highlight the importance of practical teaching strategies that focus on vocabulary growth, the application of rhetorical techniques, and providing constructive feedback. Increased exposure to effective speeches, clear instruction on rhetorical techniques, and more focused feedback that emphasizes language use can help students overcome challenges related to diction and rhetoric.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of diction and rhetorical techniques in speech writing (Makuta, 2025; Salih, 2021). However, this study focuses on the challenges experienced by vocational high school students in Indonesia, specifically in SMK Negeri 3 Lhokseumawe.

The students' limited vocabulary and diction can be linked to their lack of exposure to sophisticated language and vocabulary. Previous research has shown that a large vocabulary is necessary for good speech writing because it allows speakers to explain complicated concepts and engage audiences (Winarni et al., 2021; Suseno, 2024). The findings show that a lack of exposure to varied linguistic resources may impede students' capacity to communicate their thoughts with clarity and convincing.

Similarly, the difficulty in using rhetorical techniques might be attributed to insufficient instruction and practice. Amalia (2022) points out that while certain rhetorical skills are intuitive, others require explicit teaching and experience. This study found that many students lack the ability and confidence to use rhetorical tactics such as parallelism and repetition in their speeches. This finding is consistent with Novianti et al. (2024), who proposed that specific training and modeling of rhetorical techniques are required to assist students enhance their speech writing abilities.

Another barrier to students' creativity and language development is their reluctance to experiment with diction and rhetoric. According to Putri et al (2025), students are typically reluctant to use sophisticated language

for fear of making mistakes. This dread, along with insufficient feedback, limits students' ability to discover and develop their writing voice, which is necessary for good speech writing.

Finally, the lack of exposure to high-quality speech samples, as well as the general feedback from teachers, highlight the need for a more targeted and specialized approach to teaching diction and rhetorical techniques. Teachers should provide students with more targeted feedback on language use, a greater choice of speech samples, and more opportunities to practice these approaches.

This study emphasizes the importance of tailored instructional strategies that focus on enhancing students' diction and rhetorical techniques. By providing students with more exposure to advanced language, explicit teaching of rhetorical techniques, and focused feedback, teachers can help students develop the language proficiency required to write persuasive and engaging speeches.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on the challenges that high school students at SMK Negeri 3 Lhokseumawe faced when using diction and rhetorical techniques in speech writing. Key challenges included a limited vocabulary mastery, insufficient exposure to rhetorical techniques, and a lack of confidence in experimenting with advanced language. These challenges derive from teaching instructions that emphasize on grammar over expressive language use.

To overcome these challenges, teachers should emphasize vocabulary development, expose students to good speeches, and provide explicit instruction and feedback on persuasive skills. Incorporating these strategies will help students enhance their speech writing skills, increasing their language competency and confidence in using appropriate diction and rhetorical techniques.

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