



Investigating UNP Students' Perception of the Effectiveness of the Toastmasters Activities in Improving Their Public Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Public speaking involves delivering a message to the audience within a set time range to communicate and persuade effectively. It is an essential skill to be mastered about. This research used quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate non-English major students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Toastmasters' activities in improving their public speaking skills. The research participants were 25 non-English major students in the Toastmasters division at UKBA of UNP. Three of them participated in the semi-structured interviews. Two instruments were used: a close-ended questionnaire with yes-no options and semi-structured interviews. The total score from the questionnaire was 518 out of a maximum of 600 obtained by the 25 participants, with an impressive average percentage of 86.33%. Considering the high percentage, most students realize how important Toastmasters' activities are for improving their public speaking skills. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews indicated that students stated that Toastmasters is a valuable resource for individuals seeking to enhance their English language proficiency and develop their public speaking skills. The members reported increased confidence, overcoming nervousness, and delivering more effective speeches. Overall, the students have a positive perception of the effectiveness of the Toastmasters activities in improving their public speaking skills.

Keywords:

Perception, public speaking, toastmasters

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking in front of a group of people to communicate is commonly understood as public speaking. A wide range of topics can be covered in public speaking. Usually, public speech is restricted to a particular day, time, or location. A speaker must have specific abilities and techniques because public speaking is performed in front of the actual audience (Swargiary & Roy, 2022). Public speakers must have speaking skills and abilities that can be learned and acquired through practice. It significantly impacts a person's education, career path, level of success in a company or job, and even daily interactions between coworkers, managers and staff, and customers. Not only in the workplace, public speaking is a great way to

express ideas and make an impact on severe problems in society. As a kind of empowerment, it can affect people's concerns (Lucas, 2008).

In academic terms, most first-year college students need more experience talking to audience members. Marinho et al. (2015) discovered that students fear public speaking, particularly those who do not major in English. Nadiah et al. (2019) found that many factors can affect learners' self-confidence, such as a negative mindset, low motivation, insufficient practice, limited vocabulary, a feeling of accomplishment, and insufficient preparation. Furthermore, mastering group discussions and public presentation skills are usual needs for college students in academic environments (Rahayu et al., 2022). Receiving proper public speaking instruction can help students develop the necessary public speaking skills to help them achieve academic success. It can be done with the Toastmasters (Suryani, 2020).

Toastmasters is a global organization dedicated to helping people of all backgrounds become more confident and skilled public speakers (Toastmasters, 2024). Toastmasters activity can be found in UNP (Universitas Negeri Padang), especially at UKBA (Unit Kegiatan Bahasa Asing), a students' organization, through the Toastmasters division. According to the researcher's pre-interview with the Coordinator of the Toastmasters division, it can be concluded that the members still face difficulties in delivering ideas to others due to a lack of vocabulary and confidence to talk in English. English and non-English department students can learn to be good public speakers in this division. Everyone is allowed to train their public speaking skills in Toastmasters, including how to speak and communicate.

Speaking is a productive oral ability that creates organized vocal utterances to convey meaning (Pakula, 2019). Speaking ability consists of five aspects, according to Harris (1996): pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Coopman and Lull (2012) stated that public speaking is speaking in front of a group of people while taking on the responsibility of speaking for a set amount of time. Speaking in public is viewed as a way to spread information while maintaining the speaker's control over it (Stewart, 2009). Learning public speaking techniques will help students since it will allow them to improve their academic performance, social and personal interactions, and professional prospects (Rahayu et al., 2022). Coopman and Lull (2012) stated five arts principles for effective public speaking. Invention concentrates on ideas or arguments the speaker wants to say. Arrangement is the process of arranging ideas for a speech. Style refers to the speaker's words and who chooses to make the points in a speech come to life. Memory is the ability to recall information from the speaker's memory to deliver a meaningful speech. Delivery is giving a speech in front of the audience and making it public.

According to the previous research conducted by Suryani (2020), the study aimed to improve students' speaking abilities and determine how much of an impact Toastmasters can have on their speaking scores. The outcome pointed out that Toastmasters could improve learners' public speaking abilities. Another research was conducted by Hartati et al. (2022). This study was investigated using the Toastmasters method in independent learning and independent campus to increase students' speaking proficiency. Students' speaking abilities significantly improved when the Toastmasters method was used. The research conducted by Abdullah

(2015) aimed to determine how community language learning increases students' enthusiasm for speaking English in speaking classes and how it improves speaking skills. SMP Negeri 19 Makassar first-semester students could speak English far more fluently than they might have achieved with a traditional approach, and the participants expressed a strong desire to do the same. Lastly, the research conducted by Huriyah (2015), with classroom action research, explained how the speech community technique is implemented and improves the student's ability to speak English.

Public speaking is an important skill to be mastered. Public speaking skills would impact academic, working life, and daily life. However, students, primarily non-English major students, still face difficulty delivering their ideas in English. Many students experience fear related to certain communication situations. Some factors include insufficient practice, limited vocabulary, grammatical issues, and lack of confidence. In addition to many difficulties in public speaking, some studies have analyzed how Toastmasters techniques can improve students' ability to speak in public. Therefore, the researcher investigated the non-English major students' perception of the effectiveness of the Toastmasters activities in improving their public speaking skills.

METHOD

This research used mixed methods to investigate non-English major students' perception of the effectiveness of the Toastmasters' activities in improving their public speaking skills. Mixed methods research blends quantitative and qualitative methodologies by including both descriptive and numerical data into a single study (Geoffrey & Lorraine, 2016). The research participants were 25 students who were not English majors in the Toastmasters division. Two instruments were used: a close-ended questionnaire with yes-no options and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was adapted from Yu-Chih (2008) and included twenty-four statements. Ms. Carbiriena Solusia, S.Pd., M.Pd. and Mr. Dr. Phil. Salam Mairi, S.Pd., M.Sc. TESOL validated the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview items. The questionnaire was shared through Google Forms with the Toastmasters division's group. The data from the questionnaire was calculated with MS Excel with the formula by Sugiono (2013). Three students were chosen as the semi-structured interview participants based on the questionnaire's maximum, medium, and minimum total scores to get further information on their perception (Zhang et al., 2022). Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data from the semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The data of the semi-structured interview was presented descriptively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding

The researcher gathered data for the questionnaire on students' attitudes and perceptions about Toastmasters activities. The data was collected through Google

Forms with 25 non-English major students of the Toastmasters division of Unit Kegiatan Bahasa Asing (UKBA) at UNP. In filling out the questionnaire, various faculties of the students filled out it (see Chart 1). The Mathematics and Natural Science Faculty had the highest total of filling out the questionnaire, with eight students, with a total of 32%. The Engineering and Psychology and Health Faculty had five students filling the questionnaire, with a total of 20%. The Economic Faculty had three students, a total of 12%. The Faculty of Science and Education got two students who filled out the questionnaires with a total 8%. Meanwhile, the Social Science and Tourism and Hospitality Faculties are the lowest, with one student in each faculty answering the questionnaires, with a total of 4%.

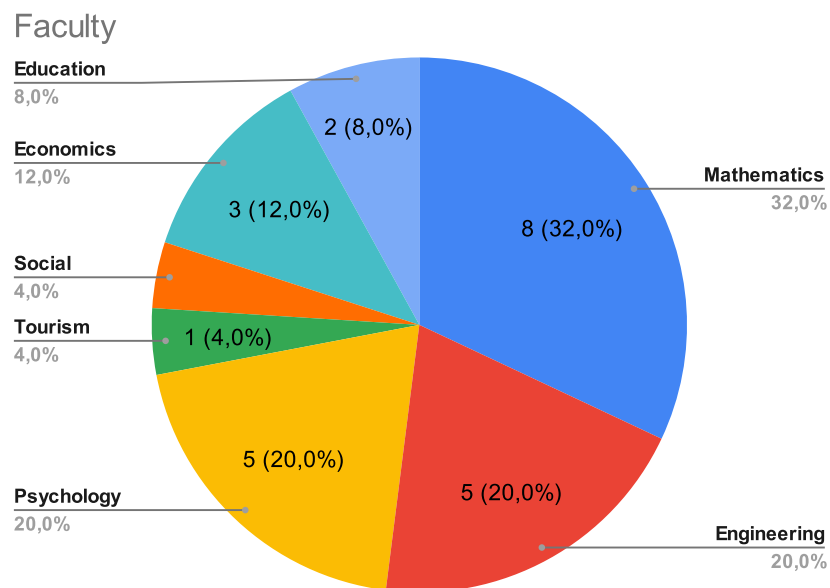


Chart 1. Faculty distribution

There were various departments of the students who filled out the questionnaires. It can be seen from Chart 2. The highest, with five responses, came from the Department of Psychology. The Department of Accounting, Mathematics, Education in Natural Science, Biology, Chemistry, and Electronics Engineering has two respondents each. The other Departments, Curriculum and Educational Technology, Economic Science, Primary School Teacher Education, Mining Engineering, Civil Engineering, State Administration Science, Family Welfare Science, and Mechanical Engineering, have one respondent of each.

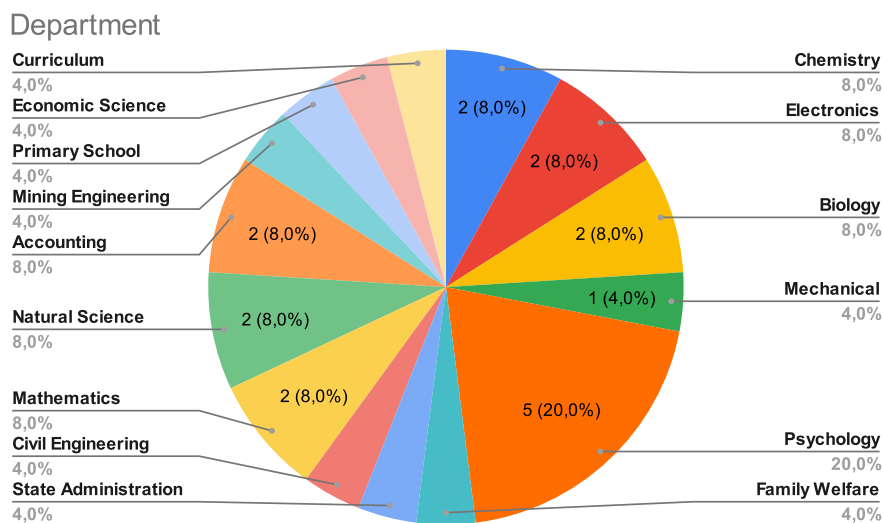


Chart 2. Department distribution

The results of the responses from the questionnaire were calculated to determine students' perceptions of the interviewees. In this research, the researcher shared the questionnaires with 25 non-English major students of the Toastmasters division of Unit Kegiatan Bahasa Asing (UKBA) at UNP. Each response to the statements in the questionnaire was assigned yes or no, with 'yes' as a value of 1 and 'no' as a value of 0. In analyzing how well students' perceptions of the Toastmasters activities have helped them improve their public speaking, the data collected offers essential insights into the Toastmasters' effectiveness. The questionnaire consisted of 24 close-ended statements with a max score of 24 and 100% as a total percentage. The scores range from 54.16% to 100%. The majority of respondents received scores in the range of 20 to 24. A total score of 518 out of a maximum of 600 was obtained by the 25 participants, with an impressive average percentage of 86.33%. Considering the high percentage, most students realize how important Toastmasters' activities are for improving their public speaking skills.

In addition to collecting students' attitudes and perceptions, the questionnaire was also used to find three interviewees for the semi-structured interviews. They were chosen based on the questionnaire's highest, medium, and minimum total scores. The highest total scores were two persons, with 100% of the total scores. For doing the semi-structured interviews with the highest total score, the researcher selected Eisa. Meanwhile, the average total score of the questionnaire was 86,33%; the participant who matched this criterion was Uju, with an 87,5% total score. Lastly, from the questionnaire results, it can be seen that the minimum total score was 54,16%, which came from Yunay. In conclusion, the participants in semi-structured interviews were Eisa, Uju, and Yunay. Three members of the Toastmasters division were involved in the semi-structured interviews. The data from the semi-structured interviews was analyzed into themes with thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2022), as follows:

1. Personal development and growth

Based on the semi-structured interviews, all the participants perceive that their personal development and growth increased during the Toastmasters' activities. According to Uju:

“Every Toastmasters activity we go forward to make a speech according to the theme, so I often goes forward and feel helped to speak and public speaking.”

Uju stated that her confidence has increased with active practice in the Toastmasters meeting. Eisa also talked about overcoming fear during the speech. Eisa said that:

“When I first joined Toastmasters activities, I used to feel blank when speaking in public, sometimes I was confused about what to say. Then joining Toastmasters activities taught me the basics, how to speak in front of the public so I would not be nervous. Now I am quite good at speaking in public.”

Furthermore, Yunay added that the Toastmasters activities improved her ability in English, especially in vocabulary. Yunay said that:

“In the past, I used to speak only one word in English and then use Indonesian and then use English again. But now I have added two or three words using English and then using Indonesian. There has been quite an improvement.”

Yunay's English ability has improved. She uses the language better in sentences than in short words, which indicates her increasing confidence and ability when speaking English.

As previously explained, Toastmasters significantly impacts members' personal growth and development. Through Toastmasters, people may face fears, gain confidence, and develop important communication skills. After joining Toastmasters, every participant said their confidence had definitely increased. They overcame their fears and anxiety and felt more comfortable speaking in front of the audience.

2. Language Proficiency

Based on the interview results, Uju claimed that the Toastmasters' games helped her expand her vocabulary. Toastmasters is a great way to improve language skills, particularly vocabulary. She said that:

“Like Undercover, breaking the Riddle, and dubbing, it is more fun and diverse and does more than focus on speech. We can also learn new vocabulary from games.”

“From speech, I learned a lot; I can improve public speaking, pronunciation, and grammar. So that I am more confident in public speaking.”

Eisa mentioned that she has significantly improved her English fluency over time. She said that:

“In the beginning, I even wanted to say, "How are you?" with friends, but I was still stuttered. Finally, I can speak a lot n.

“Absolutely 100%. My English is more advanced. The discussions in Toastmasters are informal, so we do not discuss formal issues, but informal ones as well.”

According to the feedbacks from Toastmasters activities, Yunay said that her pronunciation improved from the feedback she got during the meeting. She mentioned that:

“I usually get positive feedback. I try to apply every input given. For example, if I am given feedback on things that need to be improved, one of which is wrong pronunciation, not the right pronunciation. From the feedback, I listen to how the correct pronunciation is and which words can be used in what context.”

By concentrating on areas that require improvement, such as word choice and pronunciation correctness, Yunay shows that she is dedicated to continuing her public speaking development.

Overall, the explanation above shows that Toastmasters has been successful in helping members become more fluent in the language. The participants' English language proficiency significantly improved by concentrating on vocabulary enrichment, pronunciation improvement, and fluency growth. Games were helpful resources for increasing vocabulary. Then, exposure to various spoken languages and input from speech evaluators helped to improve their pronunciation.

3. Public Speaking Skills

From Uju's experience, she said that her ability to organize speeches is beneficial in public speaking. She also said that it can be used in her academically, even in her organization activity. Uju said that:

“For each presentation, I was the moderator, so I was able to bring more confidence and organization to the presentation, because I have spoken many times during Toastmasters activities.”

Eisa's participation in Toastmasters has improved her public speaking skills and positively impacted her professional development as a future teacher. She also added:

“Because in the Toastmasters activities I continue to develop, I was selected several times to be a delegate, presenter, and passed the student exchange to Malaysia.”

From the Toastmasters activities, Yunay found out she could do impromptu speech through practice. It is helpful for her academically and increases her confidence to talk in public. Yunay said:

“In the Toastmasters, we are trained to do impromptu speech, then later in class I also learn, speaking in public, and presenting. Especially I have taken micro teaching, practicing to be a teacher, I need to be confidence. In toastmasters, that what is taught, confidence to speak in public.”

The findings showed that participating in Toastmasters meetings significantly improved the members' public speaking abilities, including overcoming nervousness and delivering speeches. They eventually overcame their nervousness by practising frequently and participating actively in Toastmasters.

4. Organized Learning through Toastmasters

Uju has developed strong connections with other members through her involvement in Toastmasters, creating a supportive community.

“The most useful thing to do in Toastmasters is speech. From speech I learn a lot, from that I can improve public speaking, pronunciation, grammar, and so

on, so it gives me more confidence in public speaking. So that I increased my confidence in public speaking.”

“After joining and participating in Toastmasters activities, I became more enthusiastic about speaking English, so there is a place to practice more often.”

The informal discussions, structured exercises, and supportive community have significantly enhanced Eisa's public speaking skills and boosted her confidence. She stated that:

“In Toastmasters, after we write a sentence, we present it (speech), and several people evaluate it. That is why public speaking is beneficial; there are evaluators, too.”

“The discussion in the Toastmasters is informal, so we do not discuss formal issues but informally as well.”

From the collected data, Yunay stated that the Toastmasters have a supportive environment for practising her ability to learn English. Furthermore, she made many friends from the faculty and department to learn together in Toastmasters. She stated that:

“In Toastmasters, we are trained to give impromptu speeches, and later in class, I also learned to speak in public and present. Especially since I have taken micro-teaching and am practising to be a teacher, I need to be confident. In Toastmasters, what is taught is confidence in speaking in public.”

Members experience well-planned learning activities and a very supportive atmosphere. In an enjoyable setting, they feel at ease practising their English and gain a lot from engaging with other participants. Toastmasters' planned activities, such as speeches and games, have boosted confidence, enhanced English language proficiency, and fostered a positive learning atmosphere.

Discussion

This research found that the non-English major students of the Toastmasters division in UKBA showed a positive perception of the effectiveness of the Toastmasters activities in improving their public speaking skills. It improves their public speaking skills and their English language ability. According to the previous research by Suryani (2020), Toastmasters could improve students' public speaking abilities. Moreover, their public speaking skills and English language ability from the Toastmasters activities are really beneficial in their academic and daily life. Toastmasters greatly influence personal development and growth since they offer a safe space for practising public speaking. These findings, which were related to Grieve et al. (2021), stated that students who experienced fear of public speaking prefer to receive helpful advice in small groups in a friendly setting that values honesty and letting go of perfection. The participants reported feeling more confident, overcoming their fears, and communicating better. This finding connected with Abella and Cutamora (2019), who stated that Toastmasters is an outstanding resource for anyone looking to improve their public speaking and communication abilities. Kho and Ting (2023) also said that Toastmasters provides an effective approach for dealing with communication anxiety that emphasizes progressive skill development, practical experience, and beneficial feedback.

The findings showed that members improved their language proficiency through Toastmasters activities. The Toastmasters effectively contribute to vocabulary growth, pronunciation improvement, and developing fluency, an excellent way for members to increase their English proficiency. This finding is related to the five aspects of speaking ability described by Harris (1996): pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. According to the (Marinho et al., 2015), they stated that students, particularly those who do not major in English, fear of public speaking. Because of the supportive environment of the Toastmasters, it fosters a sense of confidence and empowers participants to overcome their fears. Furthermore, Coopman and Lull (2012) stated that delivery is one of the principles of effective public speaking. Based on the findings, the members implemented it in the Toastmasters activities, academics, and organization. This positive impact is evident in the significant progress made by participants in their public speaking abilities.

There were some aspects of the effectiveness based on Windham (1990): attainment effects, achievement effects, behavioral effects, and equity effects. From the data findings, students feel increased confidence, overcome nervousness, and more effective speech growth in vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency as the attainment effect. The students also achieved the effect of developing public speaking skills and English proficiency through practice and regular learning in Toastmasters. Regarding the behavioral effects, students have a positive perception of Toastmasters activities, which fosters a sense of confidence and supports overcoming fear of public speaking.

CONCLUSION

From the findings and the discussions, the non-English department students have a positive perception of the effectiveness of the Toastmasters activities in improving their public speaking skills. The members reported increased confidence, overcoming nervousness, and delivering more effective speeches. Participants experienced growth in vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. The Toastmasters environment fostered a sense of confidence and support, empowering members to overcome their fears. The program's organized activities and regular practice contributed to skill development. In conclusion, Toastmasters is a valuable resource for individuals seeking to enhance their English language proficiency and develop their public speaking skills. The program's supportive environment, structured activities, and focus on practical application make it an effective tool for personal and professional growth.

Future studies could examine Toastmasters members' proficiency in the English language in more depth. The Toastmasters' regular meetings, which include grammar feedback and public speaking processes, provide a rich basis for examining language proficiency. Researchers may learn much about how Toastmasters affects language development by looking at pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and speech fluency.

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