

EXPLORING STUDENTS' PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH BUSINESS MEETING SIMULATION

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Abstract: In today's sophisticated era, public speaking has become a crucial skill for effective communicating in formal meetings. Equipping students with the confidence to address audience is essential in speaking classes. Hence, simulation practices, like Business Meeting presentation, are employed to enhance their public speaking abilities. This descriptive qualitative study utilized a case study design, collecting the data through observation, questionnaires, and documentation from 33 students in Public Speaking class. The students' Business Meeting presentations were observed and recorded, and supplemented with insights Google form questionnaire regarding their knowledge, preparation, difficulties, and perceived benefits during the presentations. The finding revealed students' enthusiasm for Business Meeting presentation as a form of Public Speaking practice. While not all students achieved a high level of proficiency, most demonstrated commendable presentations when adequately prepared. Despite experiencing nervousness and lack of confidence while speaking to the public, they effectively overcome these challenges through meticulous preparation. Overall, the Business Meeting simulation proved beneficial in fostering students' public speaking skills, emphasizing the importance of preparation and creativity in effective preparations. This study encouraged further exploration of innovative techniques to enhance public speaking education.

Keywords: *Exploring, Students, Public Speaking, Business Meeting Simulation.*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, public speaking has emerged as a crucial skill, especially in formal meetings where clear and fluent communication is essential. For students attending speaking classes, developing the confidence to address audiences is of paramount importance. Simulation practices play a vital role in enhancing their public speaking abilities, and one such valuable practice is the Business Meeting presentation. According to Geek (2022), a business meeting involves two or more individuals coming together to discuss business-related matters and make decisions, constituting a verbal form of communication. Unlike other communication tools like e-mail or chat, business meetings offer a valuable platform for group discussions on common issues. Engaging in such activities provides students with valuable opportunities to hone their public speaking skill.

Public Speaking is a fundamental component of the English Education Study Program at Universitas PGRI Wiranegara. Designed to offer students both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, the class aims to immerse them in real-life speaking environments before an audience. According to Doyle (2021), public speaking is considered a soft skill, demanding not only impeccable communication abilities but also enthusiasm and the knack for engaging with the audience. Public speakers often deliver presentations to diverse groups, varying from small gatherings of employees to addressing large audience at national conferences or events.

One reason Business Meeting is included among the speaking practices is because, similar to public speaking, mastering effective communication during business meetings is a skill that can be acquired and develop (Wuorio, 2016). Consequently, the significance of Public Speaking lies in its ability to convey ideas to an audience, whether it involves motivating a team, conducting meetings, or delivering crucial messages. Additionally, Public Speaking offers various advantages to students in speaking classes, including improved communication abilities, heightened self-confidence, persuasive prowess, experience in planning, and the ability to express spontaneity (Spark, 2022).

The source of students' apprehension about speaking is often rooted in their own belief system, where they fear that any errors made during their presentation could be perceived as embarrassing by their peers. This fear of negative consequences, such as not being taken seriously in the future or facing criticism for their mistakes, contributes to their anxiety. It is essential for speaking class instructors to recognize that making mistakes while speaking is a natural aspect of the learning process, as nobody can achieve flawlessness in every talk. Orchids (2021) explains that speaking failures can be attributed to various reasons, including a lack of speaking skills, anxiety and fear of speaking, concerns about others' judgements, and stage fright.

Even though students might not be familiar with Business Meeting activities, the public speaking lecturer made an effort to introduce various types and phases of public speaking. To encourage creativity in their Business Meeting practice, the students were given the freedom to explore online resources and watch simulation videos. It is intrinsic to human to possess a creative side from birth; however, as people grow older, they often suppress this creativity. Therefore, individuals need to relearn how to think creatively. Anderson (2017) emphasizes that enhancing creativity requires time and effort, and he also affirms that developing creativity leads to becoming better speaker, as stated by Dr Jim Aderson.

The mentioned quote suggests that creativity has the potential to enhance public speaking abilities. According to Words (2013), public speaking goes beyond just improving confidence and communication skills; it also involves analytical thinking and creativity. Being creative means employing imagination to generate novel ideas, thinking outside the conventional boundaries, and considering global perspectives. When students engage in Business Meeting simulations, they are compelled to explore various issues and concepts, tackle challenges, find solutions, and foster teamwork to achieve their objectives and aspirations. Words (2013) further emphasizes that creative thinking is crucial in public speaking, as it requires crafting and delivering compelling speeches.

When preparing for the Business Meeting, students must also take into account the tactics employed in effective public speaking. Tay (2019) identifies three proven strategies to enhance creativity in public speaking, such as: innovative opening, humour, and connections. These strategies aim to captivate the audience from the start, infuse humour to engage and entertain, and establish unique connections to leave a lasting impact on the listeners.

The researchers were intrigued by the fascinating information about public speaking, creativity, and the role of business meeting in this context. This study aimed to explore how students' creativity can be improved through the practice of public speaking during business meetings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive qualitative method of a case study. The researchers aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the Business Meeting practice in a Public Speaking class. Data was collected through observation, questionnaire, and documentation from 33 students in the Public Speaking class of 2021. The observation spanned four weeks in November 2022, where four Business Meeting groups with 6 to 8 participants were observed, each conducting different types of meetings. The students also filled out a questionnaire via a Google Form, anonymously sharing their knowledge, preparation, difficulties, and benefits during the Business Meeting presentations. The questions required short sentence answers and some offered YES and No options.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge of Public Speaking among students

In this study, several findings are presented based on data collected through observation, questionnaires, and documentation. Rather than organizing the results by the instruments used, they are arranged according to the issues related to the Business Meeting practice in the Public Speaking class. The first set of findings pertains to students' knowledge about Public Speaking.

Public speaking is more than just talking in front of the public, it requires special skills related to the audience, situation, event type, and location. Students were asked if they could differentiate between speaking and public speaking while practicing in the public speaking class. The responses demonstrated that students are aware of what public speaking entails. They view it as the act of communicating information to an audience, either formally or informally. Scholars like Doyle and Spencer support this perspective, emphasizing that public speaking is a soft skill that involves effective communication, enthusiasm, and engagement with the audience.

Confidence is a crucial aspect of successful public speaking. Students' confidence in public speaking was examined to understand its impact on their performance. Some students expressed confidence and believed in continuous improvement, despite making occasional mistakes during their presentations. On the other hand, some students felt less confident due to limited knowledge or nervousness. The study highlighted the diverse attitudes towards confidence in public speaking.

“Public speaking refers to the act of addressing a large audience, either in a formal or informal setting, with a distinct objective in mind” (Student 02).

“Public speaking is a method of communication aimed at disseminating information to an audience in a public setting. It is commonly employed in formal occasions” (Student 09).

“In my opinion, public speaking entails the ability to address and deliver a speech to a large audience, involving the reiteration of information or other relevant content” (Student 10).

“Public speaking involves the transmission of information to an audience in real-time, either through addressing a live gathering or speaking directly face-to-face with them” (Student 20).

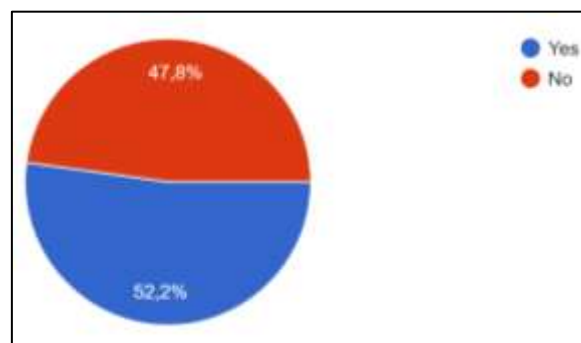


Figure 1. Students' confidence to speak in public.

The data presented in the figure above reinforce the observation that nearly half of the students (47.8%) lack confidence when it comes to public speaking. This lack of confidence stems from their nervousness while speaking in front of an audience and the accompanying feeling of embarrassment. Consequently, these factors adversely impact their ability to deliver speeches effectively. As Ewen & Said (2021) explain, public speaking is all about conveying a message to the audience, and the key focus should be on engaging the audience rather than on the speaker. When on stage, every aspect of the performance is amplified, not just the voice. Therefore, if the speaker exudes confidence, it will enhance the overall performance, whereas lacking confidence may have the opposite effect.

Relevance of incorporating Business Meeting practice in Public Speaking class

Public speaking practices encompass a wide range of activities, including self-introduction, product presentation, speech delivery, material explanation, group discussions, and meetings. Among these various activities, the public speaking class decided to focus on practicing business meetings during a specific part of their sessions. Students were randomly grouped into teams consisting of six to eight members, and each group was assigned to simulate a business meeting, allowing approximately 60 minutes for the exercise. During these simulated business meetings, students were granted the freedom to choose from a selection of business meeting types, which included Status Update Meeting, Decision-Making Meetings, Problem-Solving Meeting, Team-Building Meeting, Idea-Sharing Meeting, and Innovation Meeting. The

purpose of this arrangement was to gauge students' perspective on the suitability and relevance on practicing business meetings while the context of a public speaking class.

"Indeed, I believe that Business meeting simulation is beneficial as it imparts knowledge about procedures and the proper execution of public speaking activities" (Student 03).

"Absolutely, I consider it suitable because engaging in public speaking can enhance students' fluency and interactive skills, instilling confidence in their ability to address the public effectively" (Student 04).

"Yes, I agree. In business meetings, we often encounter new vocabulary and less commonly used sentences, which significantly enrich our understanding of the business world and its terminology" (Student 05).

"I believe it is suitable since business meeting simulations allow us to cultivate creativity in expressing our opinions and provide valuable practice in honing our public speaking skills" (Student 13).

Engaging in public speaking practice is crucial for students to enhance their ability to effectively present their ideas to the public. By participating in Business Meeting practice, students learn the proper procedures for conducting meetings and gain valuable experience in expressing themselves confidently and interactively. Additionally, they acquire new vocabulary and develop their creativity to articulate ideas and opinions during these sessions. Hero (2022) supports this notion, emphasizing that crafting an impactful speech demonstrates both creativity and critical thinking.

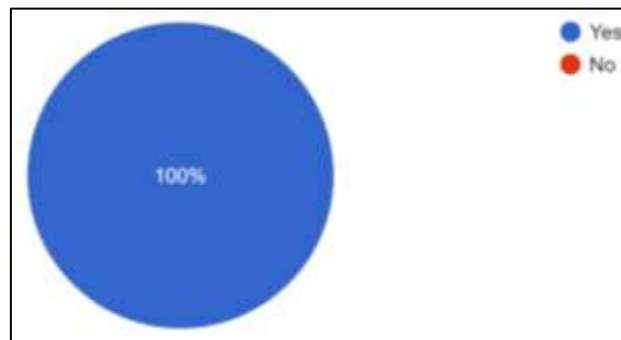


Figure 2. Appropriateness of Business Meeting practice in Public Speaking class.

Figure 2 shows unanimous agreement among all students (100%) that Business Meeting practice is well-suited for the Public Speaking class. According to Stockert (2018), participating in meetings is one of the most effective methods to refine public speaking skills. In a meeting setting, speakers are required to present ideas and engage in discussions with clients or other attendees. This provides students with valuable opportunities to prepare, practice, and deliver their presentations with precision, honing their ability to communicate effectively.

Challenges in the practice of conducting business meetings.

While nothing is truly impossible, certain things can still prove challenging to attain. This was evident during the business meeting practice, as students faced difficulties in presenting the meetings, leading to a uninspired performance. To understand the specific challenges students encountered during their public speaking practice, this question was designed to encourage students to share their experiences. These difficulties may originate from various sources, such as internal factors related to the students themselves, issues within the group dynamics, or even inadequacies in the available facilities.

“In my experience, engaging in conversation posed no difficulty for me; however, the challenge arose when it came to formulating a concept that could be practiced during the business meeting simulation” (Student 17).

“No, that’s not the case. We had already prepared a business idea that we intended to present during the business meeting simulation” (Student 22).

“Certainly, I encounter difficulties during business meeting practice due to my limited vocabulary, and I find it challenging to fully grasp the discussions happening around me” (Student 24).

“Finding suitable material to discuss business meetings proves to be challenging” (Student 25).

Indeed, practicing a business meeting poses significant challenges for students. Some difficulties they encountered include formulating suitable concepts or materials, facing vocabulary limitations, and struggling to fully comprehend others’ contributions. These challenges in meetings stem from misaligned, unprepared, or ineffective actions, making them more daunting. Understanding how people plan, execute, communicate, and operate within their work environment will shed light on the reasons behind common meeting challenges (Hewko, 2020)

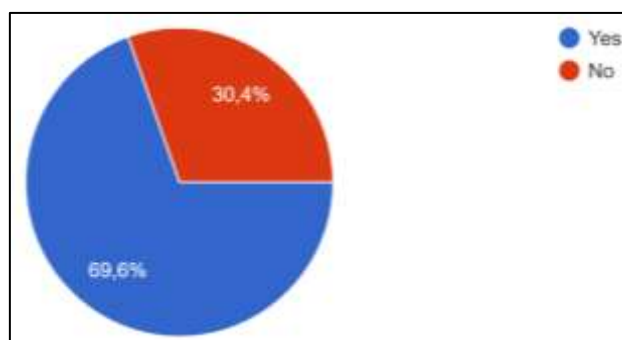


Figure 3. Difficulties in Business Meeting practice.

As seen in Figure 3 above, as many as 30.4% students did not find nor experienced difficulties in Business Meeting practice. This is due to they have prepared the materials and concept for the business meeting that they will present. Whitmore (2016) states that pre-meeting

preparation prevents poor performance and gives you an enormous advantage over someone else who shows up without having done their homework. This underlies that preparation before a meeting can minimize the difficulties which might occur during the presentation. No wonder, there were significant difference in terms of performance among groups with prepared presentation and groups with less prepared presentation.

Advantages of incorporating Business Meeting practice into Public Speaking sessions.

Despite the challenges mentioned by students earlier, they still experience valuable benefits from the Business Meeting practice. These benefits might not be immediately apparent, but they often emerge later, especially after conducting evaluations. The evaluation process can be carried out through self-assessment or group reflection. Through these reflective discussions, students can identify and categorize the various benefits they have gained by engaging in business meeting practice within the public speaking class.

“I understand the advantages of the class, as it boosts my confidence in expressing myself to others in English and enhances my vocabulary” (Student 01).

“Gradually, my nervousness dissipates, and my confidence grows stronger” (Student 33).

“To be frank, I’ve gained valuable knowledge, ranging from speaking politely and fluently to acquiring new English vocabulary and overcoming the fear of making mistakes while addressing a large audience” (Student 12).

“I have the courage to converse in English with my friends, even if my fluency is not perfect and my English may not be entirely accurate” (Student 14).

While students encountered challenges during Business Meeting practice, they also discovered numerous benefits that enriched their learning experience. Among the advantages they described were increased confidence, the acquisition of new vocabulary, diminished nervousness, and improved fluency and politeness in speech. These benefits align with Spencer’s findings (2021) that public speaking practices can enhance confidence, strengthen oral communication skills, alleviate the fear of speaking in public, and foster composure in stressful situations. It is evident that when students concentrate on activities like public speaking, they can effectively manage their nervousness, expand their relevant vocabulary, and develop appropriate meeting behavior while striving for fluency.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, students exhibited a mix of excitement and nervousness while preparing for their Business Meeting presentations in the Public Speaking class. Although some lacked confidence in speaking publicly, they possessed the necessary knowledge and preparation strategies. Many students acknowledged their anxiety and limited English proficiency, but they surprised themselves by delivering well-prepared presentations during the practice sessions. Overall, the Business Meeting practice proved to be highly beneficial for the students, helping them

overcome their fear of public speaking and enhancing their vocabulary and professional meeting skills.

As a result of this study, the researchers suggest incorporating Business Meeting practice simulations both within the class and independently in groups with friends. This approach would provide students with opportunities to experience real-life scenarios, fostering should consider integrating such practice activities and even expand the use of simulation to cultivate effective public speaking abilities in their students.

The study emphasizes that public speaking should not be seen as an insurmountable challenge, but rather as a skill that requires consistent practice to improve. Encouraging more practice enables students to develop their knowledge, confidence, and performance preparation, ultimately enhancing their overall speaking attitude. While Business Meeting practice is a valuable exercise, it is essential to explore other forms of public speaking experiences, such as speeches, product presentation, and hosting programs. This more diverse the experiences provided by speaking lecturers, the richer the knowledge and expertise gained by students in public speaking. By continuously exploring various speaking opportunities, students can confidently navigate scenarios and become proficient public speakers.

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