Current Issues in Rhetoric Learning in Higher Education

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze current issues in rhetoric education at universities, specifically related to curriculum, teaching materials, and the perceptions of lecturers and students. This study uses a literature review method with a descriptive approach, involving interviews with lecturers and students from several universities. The results show that the current rhetoric curriculum is still too theoretical and lacks emphasis on practical skills relevant to the needs of the professional world. Additionally, the teaching materials are considered insufficiently interactive and not aligned with the development of modern communication technologies. Lecturers face challenges in delivering practical content and motivating students to actively participate. Students also expressed that they often feel anxious when presenting due to a lack of practical training. This study recommends curriculum revision, the integration of digital technology, and the use of project-based learning approaches to improve the relevance and effectiveness of rhetoric education in universities.

Keywords: Rhetoric learning, Current issues, Higher Education, language teaching.

Introduction

Rhetoric learning in higher education has an important role in developing students' communication skills, especially in conveying ideas clearly, persuasively, and effectively. In the context of higher education, rhetoric becomes the main foundation for students in presenting arguments, both in academic and professional environments, (Yuningsih, 2024). This ability is not only relevant in academic contexts, but also highly needed in various fields of work, including politics, law, business, and media. Therefore, research on current issues in rhetoric learning is essential to understand how the course is delivered and received by students and lecturers, and to identify problems that arise in the learning process.

Based on interviews conducted with several lecturers and students of the Indonesian Language study program, a number of significant problems were found. Lecturers stated that the curriculum of rhetoric courses in universities tends to be theoretical and does not emphasize practices that are relevant to the needs of the professional world. The existing curriculum is also considered inflexible and difficult to adapt to the ever-changing development of communication technology (Sipahutar, 2024). On the other hand, students revealed that the teaching materials used in rhetoric courses are still not interesting and interactive. They feel that much of the material presented only focuses on classical rhetorical theory, without any application in a modern context (Saputra, 2024). Students also often feel anxious and pressured when they have to make presentations in front of the class due to the lack of practice and

practical guidance from lecturers. This perception indicates a gap between the theory taught and the practical skills needed by students in the real world.

To address this issue, several solutions have been identified. Curriculum revision is needed to be more balanced between theory and practice. Emphasis on debate exercises, presentations, and real-world communication simulations can help students better prepare for communication challenges outside the classroom (Rengganawati, 2024). In addition, the use of technology such as e-learning platforms and interactive visual aids can make learning more interesting and relevant to current conditions. Lecturers are also advised to provide constructive feedback to students more often so that they can improve their speaking skills gradually.

This research offers novelty in looking at rhetoric learning from a current perspective, taking into account the development of communication technology and the needs of the modern world of work. In contrast to previous studies that focus more on classical rhetoric theory, this research emphasizes the importance of integration between theory and practice through the use of technology and *project-based learning*. Thus, this research can make a significant contribution to the development of a rhetoric curriculum that is more in line with the needs of students in the digital era.

This study aims to identify and analyze current issues in rhetoric learning in higher education, including in terms of curriculum, teaching materials, and perceptions of lecturers and students. The results of this study are expected to provide new insights for the development of rhetoric teaching methods that are more effective and relevant to the needs of communication in the professional world.

Methods

This research uses a literature study method with a focus on philosophical review, with the aim of exploring in depth the phenomena that occur in the context of rhetoric learning in Higher Education. This method allows the researcher to collect rich and in-depth data related to the perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by lecturers and students in the rhetoric learning process. The descriptive approach was used to provide a detailed description of the existing conditions, including curriculum, teaching materials, and lecturers' and students' perceptions of rhetoric courses. The research subjects consisted of 3 lecturers who taught rhetoric courses in different universities and students who took rhetoric courses. The instruments used in this study were interviews and observations.

Result and Discussion

This study aims to explore lecturers' and students' perceptions of current issues in rhetoric learning, focusing on three main aspects: rhetoric course curriculum, rhetoric teaching materials, and lecturers' and students' perceptions of rhetoric learning. This research was conducted by interviewing several lecturers from Higher Education Institutions regarding these three aspects.

1. Rhetoric Course Curriculum

Rhetoric learning in higher education plays an important role in equipping students with critical communication skills for their professional careers. The curriculum governing rhetoric courses is foundational in determining how these skills are taught. However, based on research results and literature reviews, current rhetoric curricula face a number of challenges, especially in adapting to technological developments and communication needs in the digital age. This section will explain in detail about how the curriculum related to rhetoric courses in higher education today, based on various research and expert perspectives.

Curriculum is the basic framework in every learning, including in rhetoric learning. A good curriculum should not only contain theoretical material, but should also accommodate the practical needs of students in facing contemporary communication challenges. According to Swestin &

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Primasanti, 2011, an ideal rhetoric curriculum should include the development of basic skills such as *public speaking*, persuasion, and debate, and facilitate the application of these skills in relevant contexts, including communication in professional environments and in the context of digital media.

However, the curriculum in many universities still focuses on teaching classical theories of rhetoric. Important aspects such as ethos, pathos, logos, and classical speech structures continue to be a major part of the curriculum. Meanwhile, modern communication contexts such as debates in social media, visual rhetoric, and technology-based communication are often neglected, (Noorikhsan, 2023). Students may master the basic concepts of rhetoric, but without hands-on experience in more realistic communication situations, they are unprepared to face the challenges of the working world.

In a study conducted by Nurhayati (2022), it was found that the curriculum of rhetoric courses in several universities is still theoretical and does not accommodate direct communication practices. Most lecturers teach using the lecture method, where they explain classical rhetorical theories without giving students much opportunity to practice public speaking. This approach is considered ineffective in shaping strong communication skills.

In addition, rhetoric is taught with a focus on *public speaking* and debate, while elsewhere there is more emphasis on text analysis and written rhetoric. This variation may seem flexible, but in practice, it creates inequalities in student learning outcomes. Students who gain more experience in public speaking practice are likely to be better prepared for career challenges that demand oral communication skills, while students who focus more on analyzing written rhetoric may be better suited for academic or editorial roles.

According to Haryanto (2022), ideally, a rhetoric curriculum should incorporate approaches that are balanced between theory and practice, and offer minimum standards for the teaching of essential aspects of rhetoric, both in oral and written contexts. In addition, there is a need to regularly update the curriculum to keep up with technological developments and changing communication trends.

One important aspect that must be considered in rhetoric curriculum development is adaptation to digital technology. Today, digital communication has become an integral part of everyday life and the world of work. Therefore, rhetorical skills are no longer limited to speeches before a live audience, but also include the ability to communicate effectively through digital platforms such as social media, podcasts, webinars, and vlogs (Maduratna, 2024). However, many rhetoric curricula still do not fully accommodate this change. The curriculum still focuses on direct speaking skills, without giving much attention to visual rhetoric, digital rhetoric, or other technology-based communication. In fact, today's students are faced with new challenges, such as how to craft persuasive arguments in short video formats, or how to manage reputation and messaging through highly visual and interactive social media platforms.

According to Amelia (2021), it is important to add elements of digital rhetoric in the college curriculum. Students should be trained not only in speaking skills, but also how to communicate effectively on different digital platforms. This includes an understanding of how to use visuals and audio to support their arguments, as well as how to effectively communicate with a widespread audience through social media.

In addition, the survey results show that the majority of respondents, both lecturers and students, gave a fairly positive assessment of the rhetoric learning curriculum. As many as 60% of respondents stated that the current rhetoric learning curriculum has met the needs of students. This is in line with the findings of previous research which shows that a curriculum designed with student needs in mind can increase engagement and motivation in learning (Sharma, 2020).

However, there were about 30% of respondents who felt that the curriculum was still not fully relevant to the latest developments in rhetoric. This criticism mainly came from lecturers who stated that the curriculum needs to be updated to match the challenges of 21st century learning. For example,

critical thinking skills, collaboration, as well as the use of technology need to be more integrated in rhetoric learning. According to Brown (2019), one of the main problems in the rhetoric learning curriculum is the inability of some institutions to adapt to the rapid development of technology, thus hindering students in developing digital rhetoric skills.

While most respondents agreed that the curriculum facilitated students' speaking skills, only about 50% agreed that the curriculum was easy for lecturers to implement. This indicates a gap between curriculum design and practice in the field, which may be due to the lack of training for lecturers in implementing the new curriculum.

Based on the analysis of the current rhetoric curriculum, some development recommendations can be suggested as follows. *First,* Integration between Theory and Practice: the curriculum should offer a balance between theory and practice. While basic concepts such as ethos, pathos, and logos remain important, students also need to be given more opportunities to practice public speaking and in situations that are more relevant to the world of work. *Second, the* Use of Technology in Learning: Technology should be an integral part of the rhetoric curriculum. Students should be trained to communicate through digital platforms such as webinars, vlogs, and social media. This will help them be better prepared for modern communication challenges in the workforce. *Third,* Curriculum Standardization: The rhetoric curriculum needs to be standardized so that students in different institutions get similar learning experiences. Minimum standards in teaching rhetoric theory and practice should be developed, while still providing flexibility for lecturers to adapt the material to the local context.

2. Rhetoric Teaching Materials

Teaching materials play an important role in every learning process, including in rhetoric courses. The quality and relevance of teaching materials will greatly affect the effectiveness of learning as well as the skills developed by students. In the context of rhetoric courses, teaching materials include not only textbooks, but also other supporting materials such as videos, digital modules, and practical exercises that facilitate students to practice their communication skills. However, in reality, there are still various challenges in providing teaching materials that suit the needs of students in today's digital era. This article will discuss in detail the condition of teaching materials for rhetoric courses in higher education, including shortcomings, challenges, and recommendations for future development.

In the aspect of teaching materials, the majority of respondents 30% agreed that the teaching materials used support the achievement of rhetoric learning objectives. The teaching materials provided are considered quite easy to understand by students and relevant to the existing curriculum. However, the survey results also showed a desire to update teaching materials, especially from students. As many as 70% of students feel that the current teaching materials do not provide enough space for their creativity in composing speeches or presentations.

This desire to update the teaching materials is relevant to the research conducted by Ridwan (2022), which shows that interactive teaching materials that focus on hands-on practice can improve students' rhetorical skills. Students need more concrete examples as well as opportunities to practice speaking skills directly, either through in-class presentations or through digital *platforms*. In today's digital era, technology-based teaching materials such as video tutorials, speech simulations, and *online* learning *platforms* are considered very helpful in improving students' rhetorical skills (Panggabean, 2024).

Meanwhile, lecturers also reported that they experience challenges in developing teaching materials that are in line with technological developments. As many as 35% of lecturers feel that the teaching materials they use need to be updated to be more relevant to digital learning trends. According to lecturers, the current teaching materials are still too theoretical and do not support the maximum use of technology, which is one of the important skills in the 21st century (Hasyim, 2023).

In a study conducted by Haryanto (2022), it was found that 80% of rhetoric lecturers still use textbooks as the main source in learning. Meanwhile, only about 30% of lecturers supplement their

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teaching materials with digital or multimedia materials such as speech videos, debate examples, or interactive exercises. As a result, many students find rhetoric learning less interesting and irrelevant to contemporary communication needs.

Communication in the *modern* era has undergone a significant transformation with the development of digital technology. Therefore, teaching materials in rhetoric courses need to reflect this change. Ridwan (2022) stated that digital rhetoric should be an integral part of rhetoric teaching materials in higher education. Teaching materials that incorporate digital elements, such as the use of videos, *podcasts*, and social media, will be more effective in helping students develop communication skills that are relevant in today's digital world.

However, a survey conducted by Atkinson (2018) showed that teaching materials used in rhetoric courses are still minimal in terms of the use of digital technology. Many lecturers feel unskilled in integrating technology into their teaching materials, or do not have access to adequate resources to develop digital-based teaching materials. As a result, students miss out on the opportunity to learn how to communicate effectively through digital media, which is a much-needed skill in today's workforce.

One of the main problems in existing rhetoric teaching materials is the lack of contextualization with students' real life and professional needs. In a study conducted by Perelman (2021), it was found that many teaching materials used in rhetoric courses still focus on classical rhetoric and formal speeches, without providing many examples from more modern communication contexts, such as business presentations, courtroom debates, or persuasive communication in social campaigns.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop teaching materials that are more contextual and relevant to students' needs. The teaching materials should include more case studies, real-world examples, and exercises relevant to students' careers. According to Nurhayati (2022), rhetoric teaching materials should reflect the various communication contexts that students will face in the real world, both in formal and informal communication.

The use of multimedia in rhetoric teaching materials is still very limited in many universities. In fact, multimedia such as video, audio, and animation can be a very effective tool to help students understand rhetorical concepts and develop their communication skills. According to Saputra (2024), the use of video speech examples, debate podcasts, and visual rhetoric analysis can help students to better understand how rhetoric is applied in various real communication situations. In their study, students who studied using multimedia teaching materials showed significant improvement in their understanding of rhetorical strategies and how to apply them in practice. In addition, students also felt more motivated and engaged in learning when they were given access to more interactive and engaging teaching materials.

Based on the analysis of the current condition of rhetoric teaching materials, several development recommendations can be suggested as follows. *First, the* integration of digital technology: rhetoric teaching materials should include digital elements, such as videos, podcasts, and examples of communication on social media. This will help students develop rhetorical skills that are relevant in the digital world. *Second, the* use of multimedia: lecturers need to use more multimedia in their teaching. Videos of sample speeches, visual rhetorical analysis, and interactive exercises can help students better understand rhetorical concepts and how to apply them in various communication situations. *Third,* contextualization of teaching materials: teaching materials should be more contextual and relevant to students' real life and professional needs. Case studies, real examples from the world of work, and exercises relevant to students' careers should be an integral part of rhetoric teaching materials. *Fourth,* digital module development: universities need to develop digital modules that are interactive and easily accessible to students. This module could include videos, interactive exercises, and examples of rhetoric in various modern communication contexts. Fifth, training for lecturers: rhetoric lecturers should be given training in the use of digital and multimedia technologies, so that they can develop teaching

materials that are more interesting and relevant to the communication needs of students in the digital era.

3. Students' and lecturers' perceptions of the Rhetoric course

Based on interviews conducted with lecturers teaching rhetoric courses, several main themes emerged, including the effectiveness of teaching methods, curriculum relevance, use of technology, and difficulties encountered in applying rhetoric theory in practice.

a. Lecturers' Perceptions

Lecturers who participated in this study generally realized the importance of rhetoric courses in developing students' communication skills, especially related to effective public speaking, persuasion, and argumentation. They stated that rhetoric plays an important role in shaping students into individuals who are able to convey ideas clearly and convincingly (Sloane, 2020). Lecturers also emphasize that teaching rhetoric helps students develop critical and analytical thinking skills.

However, one of the main problems faced by lecturers is the lack of curriculum flexibility. Some lecturers consider that the existing rhetoric curriculum is too theoretical and lacks emphasis on hands-on practice, which is crucial for the development of speaking skills. Lecturers also complain about time constraints in delivering comprehensive material as well as limitations in the use of digital technology to enrich learning (Wahyuningsih, 2021).

In addition, lecturers feel that the biggest challenge in teaching rhetoric is the lack of student interest in actively participating, especially in class discussions and presentation assignments. This issue is exacerbated by differences in students' backgrounds and communication abilities, which make it difficult for some students to keep up with the learning pace. According to lecturers, there is a need for more innovative strategies, such as utilizing digital platforms and adopting project-based learning approaches, to enhance students' participation and motivation (Richards, 2019).

b. Student Perceptions

Meanwhile, student perceptions of rhetoric courses vary. Some students state that studying rhetoric helps them become more confident in public speaking and in constructing logical arguments. They consider the skills acquired from this course highly relevant to workplace demands, particularly in terms of presentations and persuasive communication (Putranto, 2024).

However, a significant number of students feel that rhetoric courses are overly difficult and burdensome. Students often experience anxiety when required to deliver presentations in class, primarily because they lack sufficient practical training in their daily activities. Some students also complain that the teaching materials used are not interactive and are more focused on theory than on direct practice. According to them, the course content tends to be repetitive year after year without adjustments to the advancements in technology and modern communication media (Seiler & Beall, 2019).

Students also express enthusiasm about the potential use of technology in rhetoric courses, such as online learning platforms and interactive visual aids. They believe that with the aid of technology, rhetoric learning can become more engaging and relevant to today's digital world (Seiler, 2019).

Furthermore, another study conducted by Miller and Pan (2020) indicates that students involved in rhetoric courses with a greater emphasis on practical activities tend to be more confident in public speaking. In their research, students participating in a project-based curriculum involving debates, presentations, and video content creation showed significant improvements in speaking and persuasion skills compared to those who only received theoretical instruction. Some students also suggested that lecturers should provide more opportunities for debate practice or real-world communication simulations to better prepare them for challenges outside the academic environment.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that while rhetoric is a crucial skill for students to face the challenges of the professional world, there are several issues with the current

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curriculum and teaching materials. The curriculum tends to be overly theoretical and lacks flexibility in adapting to advancements in modern communication technology. The teaching materials used are also considered insufficiently interactive and not fully relevant to students' current needs.

Students often feel anxious about delivering presentations due to a lack of practical training. To address these issues, a curriculum revision is needed to strike a better balance between theory and practice, along with the integration of digital technology to enhance learning effectiveness. This study offers new insights into the importance of incorporating technology and project-based approaches in teaching rhetoric to better align with the demands of today's workplace.

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