Bridging Verbal and Non-Verbal Gaps: Multimodal Presentation Skills at Islamic Higher Education

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Effective presentation skills are essential for EFL learners; however, many EFL students struggle to balance verbal proficiency with non-verbal expressiveness, leading to presentations that lack engagement, clarity, and confidence. This study explores how the integration of multimodal communication strategies can bridge the gap between verbal and non-verbal competence in EFL students' presentations. Using a concurrent embedded mixed-methods design, 17 fourth-semester EFL students were purposively selected from two classes in the teaching Grammar course at Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang. Data were collected through classroom observations, video recordings, and questionnaires, and they were analyzed using thematic and descriptive statistical methods. Findings show significant improvements in verbal delivery (pronunciation, fluency, prosody) and non-verbal expression (eye contact, gestures, posture, spatial awareness). Furthermore, it revealed that multimodal strategies enhance presentation quality and reduce language anxiety by distributing communicative load across multiple modes. It recommends embedding multimodal training in EFL curricula with constructive feedback and accessible digital tools.

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INTRODUCTION

Effective presentation skills are a critical component of academic and professional success, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners who must communicate confidently in global contexts.[1] While linguistic accuracy is essential, many EFL students struggle to deliver engaging, coherent presentations due to an overreliance on verbal content and a lack of attention to non-verbal and multimodal elements.[2] This imbalance often results in grammatically correct presentations that lack clarity, audience engagement, and expressive delivery.

In the context of Indonesian Islamic higher education, particularly in EFL classrooms, the development of effective presentation skills remains underexplored and underemphasized. Although oral presentations are a standard assessment format in Indonesian universities, instructional focus still leans heavily toward linguistic accuracy (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation). At the same time, other multimodal elements, such as gestural, aural, visual, and spatial modes, receive minimal attention. The current circumstances reflect a broader gap in pedagogical practice that contrasts with global trends emphasizing multimodal competence as a key 21st-century skill.

In multimodal communication, the interplay of linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modes is essential for delivering impactful messages. For Indonesian EFL learners, whose language proficiency may still be developing, the ability to use non-verbal strategies to support verbal delivery is not only beneficial but necessary. Nevertheless, such multimodal instruction is rarely integrated into EFL curricula in Indonesia, thereby missing an opportunity to enhance students' confidence, clarity, and audience engagement during presentations.

Current research in language education increasingly emphasizes multimodal communication as a core competence in the 21st century. Communication is not limited to spoken or written language but involves a dynamic interplay of linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modes.[3] In EFL contexts, these modes work together to enhance meaning, support comprehension, and convey emotional nuance, especially when language proficiency is still developing. For instance, a well-designed slide (visual), vocal variation (aural), purposeful gestures (gestural), and confident posture (spatial) can significantly improve the effectiveness of a presentation,[4] even if the speaker makes minor linguistic errors. In addition, nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in shaping audience perception, boosting the speaker's credibility, and maintaining the listener's attention,[5] particularly when linguistic accuracy is imperfect.

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[1] O. Baranova et al., "The Role of Communication Factors in the Development of Students' Presentation Skills," *Scientific Research and Development. Modern Communication Studies* 11, no. 6 (2022): 50–58, https://doi.org/10.12737/2587-9103-2022-11-6-50-58.

[2] Vireak Keo et al., "Exploring EFL Students' Challenges in Oral Presentations at National University of Battambang," *International Journal of Professional Development, Learners and Learning* 7, no. 2 (2025): e2513, https://doi.org/10.30935/ijpdll/16111.

[3] Jungmin Lim and Matt Kessler, "Multimodal Composing and Second Language Acquisition," *Language Teaching* 57, no. 2 (2024): 183–202, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444823000125.

[4] Yun Hyun Pack, Na Ya Choi, and Bokyung Kim, "Effects of Teaching Presentation Methods and Visual and Auditory Working Memory Capacity on Young Children's Learning Effectiveness," *Korean Journal of Child Studies* 42, no. 6 (2021): 721–40, https://doi.org/10.5723/kjcs.2021.42.6.721.

[5] Jasuli Jasuli, Sri Fatmaning Hartatik, and Endang Setiyo Astuti, "The Impact of Nonverbal Communication on Effective Public Speaking in English," *Journey: Journal of English Language and Pedagogy* 7, no. 2

Despite this, many EFL classrooms continue to prioritize linguistic elements covering grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. At the same time, non-verbal aspects, including speaking style, clarity of main points, slide design, time management, and self-confidence, are rarely taught explicitly. There are many criteria for effective presentations, many of which are non-verbal or multimodal.[6] However, students often lack training in these areas, resulting in underdeveloped presentation skills, as research showed that many EFL learners experience high levels of anxiety during presentations, often due to a lack of structured support in non-linguistic aspects of delivery.[7]

A key debate in the literature centers on whether multimodal skills should be taught systematically or develop naturally through practice. Some scholars suggest that students acquire multimodal competence through exposure and experience. In contrast, others argue that explicit instruction in vocal delivery, body language, and visual design is necessary for students to use these modes effectively and cohesively.[8] This divergence highlights a significant gap in pedagogical practice, particularly in Indonesian higher education, where presentation tasks are common but rarely supported by structured multimodal training. Evidence from other educational contexts demonstrates that implementing multimodal instruction can improve students' presentation performance and engagement.[9] Integrating multimodal technologies with diverse learning styles has been shown to improve delivery and audience interaction,[10] while such approaches also foster learner confidence and affective engagement.[11] Moreover, the use of digital multimodal tasks has proven effective in strengthening students' coherence and expressiveness in language learning.[12] Compared with these international practices, Indonesian EFL classrooms still lack structured multimodal pedagogy, limiting students' development of communicative competence beyond linguistic accuracy.

This study addresses this gap by investigating how integrating multimodal communication strategies bridges the gap between verbal and non-verbal competence among EFL students at Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang. The institution was selected because English presentations are widely practiced in the English Education Department, but remain linguistically oriented. This context is suitable for investigating how multimodal pedagogy

(2024): 226–32, https://doi.org/10.33503/journey.v7i2.4346.

[6] Junko Omotedani and Machiko Sannomiya, "Educational Intervention to Foster English Presentation Skills: Based on Implications from Metacognitive Perspectives," *Journal of Global Tourism Research* 8, no. 1 (2023): 15–26, https://doi.org/10.37020/jgtr.8.1_15.

[7] Xixin Ding, Min Chen, and Qi Xu, "Anxiety and Enjoyment in Oral Presentations: A Mixed-Method Study into Chinese EFL Learners' Oral Presentation Performance," *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 63, no. 3 (2025): 1973–97, https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2023-0161.

[8] Yow-jyy Joyce Lee, "Integrating Multimodal Technologies with VARK Strategies for Learning and Teaching EFL Presentation: An Investigation into Learners' Achievements and Perceptions of the Learning Process," *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 2, no. 1 (2019): 17–31, https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v2n1.118.

[9] Lee, "Integrating Multimodal Technologies with VARK Strategies for Learning and Teaching EFL Presentation."

[10] Xiaoshuang Guo, "Multimodality in Language Education: Implications of a Multimodal Affective Perspective in Foreign Language Teaching," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (October 2023): 1283625, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1283625.

[11] Guo, "Multimodality in Language Education."

[12] Idoia Elola, M. Camino Bueno-Alastuey, and María Victoria López-Pérez, "Integrating Collaborative Digital Multimodal Tasks in Spanish as a Second Language Course," *ReCALL* 37, no. 3 (2025): 368–84, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344025000011.

enhances both verbal and non-verbal performance.[13] The research is guided by the frameworks of verbal and non-verbal communication styles[14] and the multimodal model.[15] It examines how students employ linguistic strategies, such as discourse markers, prosody, and logical organization, in conjunction with visual aids, gestures, and vocal variation to enhance their presentations. The primary objective is to provide a practical, evidence-based framework for teaching presentation skills in EFL classrooms. The significance lies in shifting the focus from language accuracy alone to a more balanced, multimodal approach that reflects the demands of real-world communication. By highlighting the interdependence of verbal and nonverbal elements, this research makes a significant contribution to both theory and practice. It offers educators actionable strategies to develop holistic presentation competence in EFL learners. Specifically, the study addresses the following research question: How do EFL students integrate multimodal communication strategies in their academic presentations?.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a concurrent embedded mixed-methods design, with qualitative data as the primary source and quantitative data serving a supplementary role, to explore how multimodal communication strategies enhance presentation skills among EFL students. This design was selected because it provides a comprehensive approach to understanding not only the observable behaviours during student presentations but also their internal perceptions and reflections. It aligns with the research aim by enabling the triangulation of behavioral data and self-reported insights to uncover how verbal and non-verbal communication modes interact in actual classroom contexts. The research was conducted with 17 fourth-semester EFL students purposively selected from two classes in the *Teaching Grammar* course at Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang during the 2023/2024 academic year. These participants were selected from an initial pool of 35 based on their active involvement, as assessed through consistent classroom participation, engagement in previous speaking activities, and positive feedback from peers and instructors. Their prior experience delivering English presentations also ensured they could provide rich and relevant data on multimodal communication practices.

Data were collected through a structured research procedure involving multiple sources, including classroom observations, video recordings of presentations, a structured questionnaire, and an analysis of presentation materials such as slides. The process began with an orientation on multimodal communication strategies, followed by students' implementation of these strategies in their classroom presentations. During each 20-minute presentation, observations were conducted, and video recordings were made using a single smartphone placed in front of the presenter to capture verbal delivery, body language, and audience interaction. Immediately after their presentations, students completed a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire to assess their perceptions of the use and effectiveness of multimodal strategies. The main research instruments included an observation sheet based on 19 presentation criteria, [16] including

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[13] Cheryl E Ball, Kristin L Arola, and Jennifer Sheppard, *A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*, n.d.

[14] Manon Allard-Kropp, *Languages and Worldview* (University of Missouri–St. Louis, 2023), https://irl.umsl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=oer.

[15] Ball, Arola, and Sheppard, *A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*.

[16] Omotedani and Sannomiya, "Educational Intervention to Foster English Presentation Skills: Based on Implications from Metacognitive Perspectives."

pronunciation, eye contact, slide design, time management, and audience engagement, as well as a questionnaire and video recording protocols to ensure systematic and reliable data collection. The questionnaire and observation sheet were modified from existing instruments to suit the specific context of this study.

The collected data were analyzed using a dual approach to ensure comprehensiveness and validity. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data from observations and video recordings, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase process: data familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and synthesis.[17] The analysis provided an in-depth understanding of how students used linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modes in their presentations. For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to analyze questionnaire responses, and the results were visualized using bar charts. To enhance trustworthiness, triangulation was employed by cross-verifying findings from observations, video recordings, presentation materials, and self-reports. This integration of multiple data sources, instruments, and analytical techniques ensured a holistic and credible examination of how multimodal strategies contribute to the development of presentation competence in EFL learners.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A closer look at the findings shows that multimodal communication strategies serve as a critical bridge between verbal and non-verbal communication, enabling EFL students to deliver more effective, engaging, and confident presentations. Rather than functioning as isolated elements, verbal and non-verbal communication are interdependent.[18] Their integration is facilitated through the strategic use of five semiotic modes: linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial.[19] Thematic Analysis revealed the following theme.

The Interdependency of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

The interview revealed the interdependency of verbal and non-verbal communication in student presentations. Several participants acknowledged that while their language proficiency enabled them to convey ideas verbally, their delivery often lacked the dynamism necessary to engage the audience fully.

"I felt my sentences were correct, but sometimes I saw the audience lose interest because I did not know how to use my hands or make my voice more expressive." (Student 2)

"I spent so much time making sure my grammar and vocabulary were perfect, but when I presented, I realized I was not really connecting with the audience. I barely looked up from my notes." (Student 3)

This study underscored the crucial role of non-verbal elements in effective presentation delivery, illuminating the holistic nature of communication. Verbal communication, which encompasses language-based features, such as discourse markers, pronunciation, and prosody,[20] It is indeed important. However, non-verbal communication, including elements such as

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[17] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (SAGE, 2022).

[18] Allard-Kropp, *Languages and Worldview.*

[19] Kristin L. Arola et al., *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2014).

[20] Allard-Kropp, *Languages and Worldview.*

speaking style, gestures, confidence, and slide design, is equally significant. It aligns with previous research, which shows that many students, while excelling in grammar and vocabulary, struggle with aspects of delivery, such as eye contact, vocal variation, and audience engagement.[21] This variation in students' multimodal performance aligns with the idea that learners use different styles and strategies to process information, affecting how they engage with presentation tasks.[22]

Several respondents also described challenges with integrating visual aids effectively. One student explained,

"I spent much time designing my slides, but during the presentation, I did not know how to use them well. Sometimes I read too much from the slides instead of speaking naturally."

This statement highlights the gap between creating visual materials and integrating them into the spoken delivery. This pattern highlights the importance of a balanced communication approach in effective presentations. It is not just about verbal fluency, but also about expressive delivery. The ability to convey meaning clearly and connect with audiences depends on integrating multiple modes of communication. Rather than depending solely on linguistic accuracy, students benefit from coordinated use of gestures, vocal modulation, visual design, and spatial positioning.[23] Furthermore, slides, images, infographics, and animations support understanding and retention. Visuals should complement, not compete with, the spoken message, and can be especially powerful when used interactively.[24]

Linguistic Mode: Where Verbal Dominates, but Non-Verbal Supports

Building on the previous section, the linguistic mode serves as the foundation of verbal communication. It includes elements such as word choice, grammatical structure, sentence construction, and overall discourse organization. In this study, students demonstrated commendable proficiency in these areas, as reflected in high scores for pronunciation (78.99%) and speech organization (79.32%). These results suggest that the learners had a solid command of spoken English, enabling them to articulate their ideas clearly, maintain logical flow, and utilize language features such as discourse markers, cohesive devices, and formal expressions.

Nonetheless, the findings indicate that strong language skills do not always result in effective delivery. This is supported by previous research, which shows that effective presentations result from a holistic approach that integrates language, delivery, and affective

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[21] Elisabeth Marsella and Vinindita Citrayasa, "Analyzing University Students' Learning Needs to Improve English Presentation Skills," *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature* 12, no. 2 (2025): 2660–72, https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v12i2.5895.

[22] Aries Fitriani, "Learning Styles and Strategies in Second Language Learning: Theoretical Review," *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan dan Kemasyarakatan* 11, no. 2 (2013): 267. https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v11i2.203.

[23] Ahmad Burhanuddin, "Improving Students' Oral Communication Skills in Public Speaking through Individual Presentation Task," *Jurnal Lingua Idea* 12, no. 2 (2021): 159, https://doi.org/10.20884/1.jli.2021.12.2.4002

[24] Stella Doukianou, Damon Daylamani-Zad, and Kathy O'Loingsigh, "Implementing an Augmented Reality and Animated Infographics Application for Presentations: Effect on Audience Engagement and Efficacy of Communication," *Multimedia Tools and Applications* 80, no. 20 (2021): 30969–91, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11042-021-10963-4.

skills.[25] Non-verbal factors, such as speaking style and audience interaction, scored significantly lower. These findings highlight the need for instruction that extends beyond grammar and vocabulary.

A multimodal perspective highlights the importance of verbal delivery aspects. Elements such as tone, pacing, and posture help reinforce meaning and enhance communication. Instruction should focus on helping students connect their language skills with engaging, audience-focused delivery.

Table 1. Verbal vs. Non-Verbal Performance in the Linguistic Mode

Aspect	Verbal Performance (%)	Non-Verbal Performance (%)
Word Choice	77.65	46.05
Delivery of Spoken/Written Text	78.99	43.19
Organization of Writing/Speech	79.32	39.49
Development & Coherence of Ideas	75.12	44.20
Average	**77.77**	**43.23**

Source: *Observation and video analysis (2024)*

This gap highlights a key issue in EFL presentation performance. Although students can construct and deliver linguistically accurate messages, they often lack the non-verbal fluency required to make those messages truly effective and engaging. Non-verbal fluency refers to the ability to reinforce verbal content with dynamic vocal delivery, facial expressions, gestures, and visual skills that are often underrepresented in traditional EFL instruction.[26] As a result, presentations may appear well-structured in terms of language but fail to capture or maintain audience attention due to flat tone, limited variation in speech, or minimal use of visuals.

In this study, the visual and aural modes were found to play an essential role in bridging this gap. These modes provided contextual scaffolding to support verbal output and compensate for weaknesses in expressive delivery. For instance, aural elements such as intonation, pauses, and stress, collectively known as prosody, allowed students to emphasize key points, convey emotional nuance, and manage the rhythm of speech more effectively.[27] Even students with limited vocabulary or lower confidence levels were able to guide audience interpretation through strategic vocal variation.

Meanwhile, the visual mode—in the form of slide design, layout, color, and imagery—served as a nonverbal anchor for both the speaker and the audience. Visual aids helped clarify meaning, reduce cognitive overload, and structure information, thereby enhancing retention and

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[25] Sami Algouzi, Ali Abbas Falah Alzubi, and Mohd Nazim, "Strengthening English Language Undergraduates' Presentation Skills: A Blackboard-Mediated Intervention Program," *PLOS ONE* 18, no. 8 (2023): e0289936, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0289936.

[26] A. H Putra, "Integrating Web 2.0 Technologies in Multimodal Pedagogy: A Pathway to Learner Engagement," *Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan 25, No. 2* 25, no. 2 (2023): 134–48, https://doi.org/10.31002/jtp.v25i2.78543.

[27] Gunther Kress and Bezemer Jeff, "Multimodal Discourse Analysis," in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2023), https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003035244-12/multimodal-discourse-analysis-gunther-kress-jeff-bezemer.

comprehension.[28] Students who used well-designed slides were more likely to stay on topic, avoid verbal redundancy, and engage more actively with their audience.

These findings align with the broader view of multimodal learning, which considers communication as a process shaped by the interaction among various semiotic resources, including verbal, visual, spatial, and gestural elements.[29] When students combined visual and aural strategies with their verbal output, they achieved greater clarity, presence, and a stronger connection with their audience. This combination of modes supports the idea that multimodal competence enables learners to distribute their communicative load across different channels, thereby reducing pressure on verbal accuracy alone and promoting more balanced, audience-centered communication.[30]

Visual Mode: A Platform for Integrating Verbal and Non-Verbal Elements

The visual mode emerged as a particularly effective medium for bridging the gap between verbal and non-verbal communication in student presentations. In this study, students did not use slides merely as platforms for displaying written content, but rather as a means of enhancing their spoken messages through thoughtful use of design elements such as color, layout, font size, and imagery. Research consistently shows that slides are most effective when used to enhance spoken messages through careful design choices.[31] This study suggests that learners are increasingly aware that meaning in a presentation is conveyed not solely through words but also through how information is visually organized and perceived by the audience.

According to Table 2, students achieved notably high scores across several aspects of visual communication. For instance, the clarity of the main point reached 81.18%, and content engagement when using color was rated at 98.82%. These results indicate that students strategically use visual elements to draw attention, highlight key messages, and increase the aesthetic appeal of their slides. The use of color coding, visual hierarchies, and symbolic imagery not only reinforced their verbal delivery but also helped guide the audience's understanding in a more structured and accessible way.[32]

However, despite this success in visual design, students scored significantly lower in self-confidence (30.59%) when delivering presentations supported by their slides. This discrepancy points to an important pedagogical insight. While students are increasingly adept at creating engaging visual materials, many still lack the performative skills necessary to present them with confidence and coherence. In other words, well-designed slides cannot compensate for limited vocal expressiveness, lack of audience awareness, or rigid body posture. Visual competence

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[28] Barbara Hey, "Visualisation in the Talk—Design Slides in a Professional Manner," in *Mastering Scientific Presentations*, by Barbara Hey (Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-44184-5_4.

[29] Fei Victor Lim and Lydia Tan-Chia, *Designing Learning for Multimodal Literacy: Teaching Viewing and Representing* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

[30] Joohoon Kang, "Developing Multimodal Communicative Competence: Adolescent English Learners' Multimodal Composition in an After-school Programme," *Literacy* 56, no. 4 (2022): 355–70, https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12294.

[31] Joyce R. Moldez and Donita May C. Valera, "A Semiotic Analysis of Visual Elements on Slide Presentations used in College English Class," *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)*, April 11, 2024, 235–41, https://doi.org/10.36713/epra16401.

[32] Hey, "Visualisation in the Talk—Design Slides in a Professional Manner."

must be complemented by strong delivery skills in order to achieve effective multimodal communication.

These findings suggest that while visual aids enhance message clarity and audience engagement, they do not automatically improve speaker confidence or fluency. Therefore, instruction in multimodal presentation should extend beyond slide design and include training in how to interact effectively with those visuals, both orally and physically, during live delivery. Techniques such as maintaining eye contact while referring to slides, gesturing toward key visuals, and synchronizing speech with slide transitions can help students present more dynamically and assertively.[33]

Table 2. Non-Verbal Performance in the Visual Mode

Visual Aspect	Speaking Style (%)	Clarity of Main Point (%)	Interesting Content (%)	Self-Confidence (%)	Audience Involvement (%)
Color	72.10	77.65	98.82	30.59	75.29
Layout	62.86	81.18	54.12	35.29	50.59
Style	72.10	68.24	76.47	67.06	69.41
Size	60.67	82.35	61.18	45.88	47.06
Perspective	59.83	76.47	63.53	47.06	56.47

Source: Questionnaire result (2024)

These findings suggest that effective visual design plays a crucial role in supporting non-verbal communication by reducing cognitive load and enhancing message clarity. When visual elements are presented in a clean, organized, and purposeful manner—such as through minimalist slide templates, consistent font styles, and color-coded sections—students can more easily convey key points without overwhelming themselves or the audience. Mayer's multimedia learning theory emphasizes minimizing extraneous information in visual materials to help learners process and retain essential content more efficiently. The effectiveness of digital multimodal elements in enhancing students' oral delivery is consistent with evidence that CALL can boost speaking performance and learner engagement.[34]

By simplifying slide design and organizing content visually, students were better able to manage their cognitive resources during live presentations. Rather than dividing their attention between reading text-heavy slides and recalling spoken material, they could use the slides as a visual cue to support memory, maintain eye contact, and focus on audience interaction. In this way, visual design functions as a scaffolding tool, allowing presenters to shift their attention from managing complex information to delivering it with a more expressive tone, gestures, and spatial awareness.[35]

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[33] Moldez and Valera, "A Semiotic Analysis of Visual Elements on Slide Presentations used in College English Class."

[34] Pryla Rochmahwati and Zakaria Bintang Pamungkas, "The Effect of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) toward Speaking Ability in STAIN Ponorogo," *Cendekia: Journal of Education and Society* 13, no. 2 (2016): 341, https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v13i2.253.

[35] Alexander Skulmowski and Kate Man Xu, "Understanding Cognitive Load in Digital and Online Learning: A New Perspective on Extraneous Cognitive Load," *Educational Psychology Review* 34, no. 1 (2022): 171–96, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09624-7.

Moreover, the use of color-coded highlights and structured layouts not only guided audience attention but also increased the students' confidence in navigating their content. For example, color contrasts helped emphasize transitions between topics, while visual symmetry improved the slides' perceived professionalism, both of which contributed to a more polished and engaging presentation. This finding is consistent with research emphasizing that well-integrated multimodal texts enhance speaker autonomy and reduce anxiety in EFL contexts.[36]

Thus, visual design is not merely a static background to spoken language, but an active, semiotic mode that interacts dynamically with verbal and non-verbal elements. When students are taught how to design slides with cognitive and communicative intent in mind, they are more likely to present with fluency, presence, and a greater sense of rapport with their audience.

Aural Mode: The Bridge Between Verbal and Non-Verbal Expression

The aural mode, which includes vocal features such as tone, pitch, volume, pauses, and intonation, plays a central role in linking verbal content with non-verbal expressiveness. Unlike purely linguistic elements that rely on word choice or grammar, the aural mode adds emotional depth, emphasis, and rhythm to spoken language, thereby functioning as a bridge between what is said and how it is delivered. In this sense, the aural mode allows speakers to control audience perception and engagement, even when their lexical or syntactic choices are limited.

Findings from this study confirm the importance of the aural mode in EFL presentations. As shown in Table 3, 64.71% of students reported that their classmates could clearly understand the intended meaning conveyed through their vocal intonation. This relatively high level of self-perceived aural expressiveness suggests that many students are aware of how tone and pitch variations help convey certainty, enthusiasm, emphasis, or hesitation—elements crucial for effective communication in academic contexts. Such awareness is essential in second-language learning, where students may not yet have a full lexical range and must rely on paralinguistic cues to enhance clarity and impact.[37]

Furthermore, the use of intonation and pauses enables students to segment their ideas logically, highlight transitions between sections, and build rhetorical tension, all of which contribute to a more compelling delivery. Kress and Bezemer's notion that prosody is a semiotic resource in itself, capable of shaping meaning beyond the literal interpretation of words.[38] For example, rising intonation can signal openness or inquiry, while a deliberate pause can give the audience time to process a key point.

Interestingly, the ability to use aural cues effectively often correlates with improved speaker confidence and perceived fluency.[39] EFL learners who engage consciously with their vocal delivery tend to show greater command of the presentation setting and report lower anxiety levels.[40] Thus, the aural mode not only enhances message clarity but also supports the speaker's overall presence and emotional control.

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[36] Putra, "Integrating Web 2.0 Technologies in Multimodal Pedagogy: A Pathway to Learner Engagement."

[37] Debra M Hardison and Martha C Pennington, "Multimodal Second-Language Communication: Research Findings and Pedagogical Implications," *RELC Journal* 52, no. 1 (2021): 62–76, https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220966635.

[38] Kress and Jeff, "Multimodal Discourse Analysis."

[39] Hardison and Pennington, "Multimodal Second-Language Communication."

[40] Ding, Chen, and Xu, "Anxiety and Enjoyment in Oral Presentations."

Table 3. Students' Self-Perception of Aural Mode Use

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
My classmates understand the meaning of my vocal intonation	17.65	41.18	29.41	11.76	0
I use specific vocal intonation in my presentation	17.65	47.06	23.53	11.76	0

Source: Questionnaire result (2024)

For example, one student intentionally paused after delivering a controversial claim, creating a moment of suspense that immediately drew the audience's attention. This deliberate use of silence functioned as a rhetorical strategy, prompting listeners to reflect on the message and anticipate the next point. In doing so, the student demonstrated an effective use of the aural mode not just for speech delivery, but as a tool to shape audience engagement through rhythm and pacing.

Such practice aligns with the idea that prosody, encompassing pause, tone, and intonation, is a semiotic resource in its own right, capable of transmitting both emotional signals and interpretive cues.[41] Through carefully modulated vocal elements, speakers can emphasize important ideas, signal shifts in discourse, or express interpersonal stance, even without altering the content of their speech. The statement confirms that the aural mode serves as a dual channel, simultaneously supporting verbal clarity and non-verbal expressiveness.

Moreover, the ability to use such features effectively reflects a growing awareness among EFL students that communication is not limited to grammatical correctness but involves strategic control of how language is delivered. Non-verbal behaviors, such as vocal tone and pacing, are often shaped by cultural expectations and contextual awareness.[42] In this case, the student's pause conveyed both assertiveness and sensitivity to audience reaction traits that enhance credibility and rhetorical impact in academic presentations.

Gestural and Spatial Modes: Dominance of Non-Verbal Communication

The gestural and spatial modes are core components of non-verbal communication, relying on body language, facial expressions, hand gestures, posture, and movement within physical space. These modes function beyond spoken language, enabling presenters to visually emphasize ideas, express emotion, and regulate interaction with the audience. In multimodal presentations, gestures and spatial behavior serve not only as supportive elements but as meaning-making resources that operate alongside verbal language to reinforce, complement, or even substitute for spoken content.[43]

In this study, students demonstrated strong performance in these non-verbal modes. As shown in Table 4, they achieved the highest scores in clarity of main point (96.47%) and self-

[41] Paula Janjić et al., "The Role of Pointing Gestures and Eye Gaze in Second Language Vocabulary Learning," *Discourse Processes* 62, nos. 8–9 (2025): 673–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163853X.2024.2343625.

[42] Lailatul Nur Azizah, Risca Dwi Anggraini, and Siti Maria Ulfa, "Exploring the Impact of Cultural Diversity on Teacher's Nonverbal Communication," *Social Studies in Education* 1, no. 1 (2023): 1-22.

[43] Janjić et al., "The Role of Pointing Gestures and Eye Gaze in Second Language Vocabulary Learning."

confidence (77.65%) when using hand gestures. These results suggest that gestural communication enabled students to convey important ideas more effectively than through words alone. Gestures such as pointing, framing, or illustrating size or direction served as visual cues that guided the audience's attention and clarified abstract concepts. The statements above align with the findings of Lei and Zhang, who note that gestures can enhance the interpretability of spoken content and create a more vivid and engaging delivery.[44]

Moreover, the relatively high self-confidence scores suggest that using gestures and controlled spatial positioning helped students feel more grounded and expressive during their presentations. Strategic use of space, for example, moving closer to the audience when making a personal point or stepping aside when transitioning between sections, can project a sense of authority and presence. Then, embodied communication is deeply tied to cultural norms and personal identity.[45] When learners feel comfortable using these modes, their performance becomes more authentic and persuasive.

Interestingly, students who score higher in gestural-spatial modes than in verbal delivery underscore the potential of non-verbal expressiveness as a compensatory strength in EFL contexts. For learners who may still struggle with vocabulary or fluency, body language becomes a powerful tool to maintain audience engagement and emphasize intention. Multimodal instruction should not treat non-verbal modes as secondary but as central channels through which learners construct and communicate meaning.[46]

Therefore, these findings highlight the importance of incorporating gestural and spatial awareness into presentation training. By intentionally encouraging students to integrate movement and body expression with their verbal content, educators can help them develop more confident, persuasive, and multimodally competent communication skills.

Table 4. Non-Verbal Impact of Gestural Mode

Gestural Aspect	Clarity of Main Point (%)	Self-Confidence (%)	Audience Involvement (%)
Facial Expression	81.18	71.76	74.12
Hand Gestures	96.47	77.65	74.12
Body Language	85.88	70.59	72.94
Interaction (Proximity)	85.88	63.53	71.76

Source: Questionnaire result (2024)

Similarly, the spatial mode, referring to the use of physical space, movement, and proximity, played a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of student presentations. In purposeful movement on stage, stepping forward to emphasize a key point helps increase audience engagement. Moving sideways to signal a change in topic can also enhance speaker confidence and clarity. This deliberate use of space not only added a visual rhythm to the

[44] Qian Lei and Chunlei Zhang, "Using Multimodal Resources to Design EFL Classroom Lead-Ins—A Multimodal Pedagogical Stylistics Perspective," *Linguistics and Education* 83 (October 2024): 101338, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2024.101338.

[45] Azizah, Anggraini, and Ulfa, "Exploring the Impact of Cultural Diversity on Teacher's Nonverbal Communication."

[46] Lei and Zhang, "Using Multimodal Resources to Design EFL Classroom Lead-Ins—A Multimodal Pedagogical Stylistics Perspective."

presentation but also helped students regulate pacing, mark transitions, and maintain audience attention.

Students who incorporated spatial strategies, such as changing position to signal progression or varying their distance from the audience, were perceived as more dynamic, organized, and credible. These movements conveyed intentionality and awareness, projecting a sense of control over the presentation environment. Spatial behavior is a culturally situated form of non-verbal communication that reflects the speaker's interpersonal stance and self-assurance.[47] When used effectively, it reinforces verbal content and strengthens the audience's perception of the speaker's authority.

Moreover, moving with purpose serves a semiotic function, where spatial positioning becomes part of the message itself. For instance, walking forward during a key claim can symbolize confidence and invitation, while stepping back after delivering a point can signal closure or reflection. This spatial expressiveness enhances multimodal coherence, aligning what is said with how it is physically conveyed.[48]

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be interpreted through the lens of multimodal discourse theory [49] and communication style theory.[50] According to these frameworks, communication is a social semiotic process in which meaning is constructed not only through language, but also through the interplay of multiple modes. The high performance in gestural and spatial modes indicates that students are naturally inclined to use bodily and spatial resources to compensate for linguistic limitations. The gap between verbal and non-verbal performance in the linguistic mode, where students scored high in grammar (78.99%) but low in speaking style (43.19%), can be explained by pedagogical bias. Traditional EFL classrooms often prioritize linguistic accuracy over expressive delivery, leading to competent speakers who lack confidence and audience awareness. This imbalance underscores the need for a shift from language-centered to communication-centered pedagogy, where fluency, expressiveness, and audience engagement are equally valued.

Ultimately, implementing multimodal communication strategies has effectively bridged the gap between verbal precision and non-verbal expressiveness among EFL learners. By integrating linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modes, students delivered presentations that were not only accurate but also engaging and emotionally resonant. Each mode contributed uniquely—language structured the message, visuals directed attention, voice added emphasis, gestures conveyed intent, and spatial movement marked transitions—enabling more holistic and persuasive communication. Instead of relying solely on verbal fluency, students utilized multimodal resources to alleviate cognitive load and enhance their delivery. These results confirm that multimodal competence is not a complement to language proficiency, but rather a core element of communicative effectiveness.

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[47] Azizah, Anggraini, and Ulfa, "Exploring the Impact of Cultural Diversity on Teacher's Nonverbal Communication."

[48] Kang, "Developing Multimodal Communicative Competence: Adolescent English Learners' Multimodal Composition in an After-school Programme."

[49] Kress and Jeff, "Multimodal Discourse Analysis."

[50] Allard-Kropp, *Languages and Worldview.*

CONCLUSION

Integrating multimodal communication strategies (linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial) effectively bridges the gap between verbal and non-verbal competence in EFL presentation skills. Students who combined structured verbal delivery with purposeful use of visual design, vocal variation, gestures, and spatial awareness showed marked improvements in clarity, audience engagement, and presentation fluency. In light of these findings, EFL instruction should shift its focus beyond a narrow emphasis on linguistic accuracy to adopt a more holistic approach that trains learners to integrate multiple communicative modes. By adopting this approach, students can strengthen their self-efficacy and develop into persuasive, audience-aware communicators prepared for both academic and professional contexts.

In addition to its pedagogical value, this study contributes to the global discourse on multimodal literacy by offering empirical evidence from an Islamic higher education context that is rarely examined in existing research. The findings demonstrate that presentation competence cannot be reduced to oral communication alone, as students must bridge verbal and non-verbal gaps through the coordinated use of linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modes. Nonetheless, this study was limited to a small sample from a single university, which may restrict the generalizability of its conclusions. Further research with broader participant demographics and varied institutional contexts is recommended to expand and validate these insights.

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