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Students' Perceptions of Nonverbal Communication in Oral Presentations: Kinesics and Vocalics

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ABSTRACT

Speaking skills, particularly oral presentation skills, are essential for effective communication. At the tertiary level, students are required to deliver oral presentations as part of the learning process and assessment. Therefore, awareness of oral presentation skills is important to help students communicate their ideas effectively. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of the use of kinesics and vocalics in oral presentations. A quantitative survey approach was employed using a questionnaire consisting of four sections: demographic profile, kinesics, vocalics, and open-ended responses. A total of 42 undergraduate students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, were purposively selected and invited to complete an online survey. In terms of kinesics, the findings indicated that students commonly used hand gestures to emphasize their points and frequently referred to slides, notes, the whiteboard, or the computer during their presentations. Regarding vocalics, students reported increasing their pitch when they were excited and using different tones to express their emotions during presentations. These findings provide students with greater awareness of their presentation skills and encourage them to improve their oral presentation performance. The findings also provide instructors with insights to better guide students in enhancing their presentation abilities and developing more effective oral presentation practices.

KEYWORDS: nonverbal communication, oral presentation, kinesics, vocalics

Introduction

People communicate to convey information. Communication is commonly perceived as a two-way process that primarily involves the use of language to exchange information (Iksan et al., 2011; Mihat, 2016). However, language is not the only means of communication. Nonverbal communication is also used, whether one realizes it or not. Nonverbal cues include body language, eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, tone, and pitch. These cues are relevant in various contexts, including family, social, educational, and workplace settings (Knapp & Daly, 2011).

Specifically, in the university educational settings, students are required to deliver oral presentations to inform or persuade audiences about a particular topic (Al-Nouh et al., 2015). Oral presentations are commonly used to develop students' communication skills, and presenters may incorporate visual and audio elements to support message delivery (Tuong, 2022). As presentation skills are essential in academic and professional contexts, students need to be prepared to deliver effective presentations from the beginning of their academic journey (Al Harun et al., 2016). Despite this, ESL learners continue to experience difficulties in developing speaking skills, suggesting that oral communication remains a challenging area for many students (Yahaya et al., 2021). Similarly, Malaysian university students have also reported challenges related to preparation, confidence, and delivery during oral presentations (Aziz et al., 2022). These challenges highlight the need to understand factors that contribute to effective presentation delivery, including the role of nonverbal communication.

Both verbal and nonverbal communication are crucial in delivering effective oral presentations. Although both forms can function independently, they are often used together because they serve different communicative purposes (Guerrero & Farinelli, 2009). Verbal communication delivers the content, while nonverbal communication conveys emotions and supports message delivery, allowing presenters to connect with the audience effectively (Al Harun et al., 2016). However, students may have limited awareness of how nonverbal cues can be used effectively, which may affect message delivery and audience understanding. Therefore, understanding students' perceptions of nonverbal communication, particularly kinesics and vocalics, is important in the context of oral presentations. A recent study also highlighted that multimodal learning activities can support oral skill development by integrating visual, verbal, and interactive elements to enhance speaking performance (Hadizadeh, 2025).

There are several types of nonverbal communication, namely kinesics, paralanguage (vocalics), proxemics, haptics, olfactics, physical appearance and dress, and chronemics (Neuliep, 2020). In the context of this study, kinesics and vocalics are investigated because they are commonly used during oral presentations. Hence, this study is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How do students perceive the use of kinesics in oral presentations?
2. How do students perceive the use of vocalics in oral presentations?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework - Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is a form of communication that does not involve the use of words to convey messages. It refers to important features of presentation through which audiences interpret presenters' body language, such as posture, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions, which are visible to others (Al Harun et al., 2016). However, nonverbal communication extends beyond body language. Vocal characteristics such as volume, speed, pitch, and tone are also considered nonverbal cues. This is because nonverbal communication refers not only to what a person says but also how the message is delivered. Through nonverbal communication, individuals can express emotions, feelings, and meanings through actions, expressions, and vocal variations rather than verbal language alone. In some situations, body language and facial expressions may be more effective than words in expressing emotions (Hans & Hans, 2015).

Kinesics

Kinesics, or body movement, includes gestures, hand and arm movements, leg movements, facial expressions, eye contact, and posture. These movements can take various forms, such as nods, smiles, head shakes, glances, raised eyebrows, hand and finger gestures, shoulder movements, or hip wobble. While nearly any part of the body can be used to communicate nonverbally, the face, hands, and arms are the primary channels for sending nonverbal messages (Basir & Ro'lfah, 2018; Neuliep, 2020).

Posture

Posture typically refers to how people position themselves when sitting, standing, or moving. For a presentation to be effective, a presenter should focus on maintaining a confident and graceful posture (Gogoi, 2015).

Eye contact

Eye contact is an essential aspect of oral presentations as it helps engage the audience and establish trust. When a presenter maintains good eye contact, the audience is more likely to connect with the speaker and believe in their message. Holding eye contact for three to five seconds demonstrates sincerity, showing that the presenter is genuine and focused on capturing the audience's attention. It also reflects confidence, suggesting the presenter is well prepared and at ease with their content. On the other hand, presenters who rely too much on their notes or hide behind a screen risk losing the audience's attention (Rahmat et al., 2019; Ansari et al., 2022; Gogoi, 2015).

Facial expression

The face is the most expressive part of the body. Feelings such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust, and distress are expressed through facial expressions (Rahmat et al., 2019; Ekman, 2004). For instance, people smile to project happiness and excitement, frown to signify disgust or anger, or pout to indicate sadness. In oral presentations, facial expressions play a crucial role as they help presenters communicate their emotions to the audience. By using facial expressions, presenters can emphasize key points and show their engagement with the topic being discussed (Rahmat et al., 2019).

Gestures

Gesture refers to the movements of body parts other than the face and eyes, such as the hands, arms, head, and shoulders. These movements are important in oral presentations as they allow for nonverbal communication with the audience. Appropriate gestures can enhance the meaning of the message being delivered. When the audience sees an active presenter, they are more likely to stay focused and involved. Moreover, gestures can reflect the presenter's level of confidence. A presenter who remains still may appear less confident, leading to a dull presentation. However, when not used correctly, gestures can become awkward and cause miscommunication (Rahmat et al., 2019; Gogoi, 2015).

Vocalics

Vocalics, or vocal characteristics, refers to the study of voice features, such as tone, used to convey messages (Rahmat et al., 2019). Additionally, elements such as volume, speed, and pitch are also vocal characteristics. Speakers can use these different aspects of voice to achieve the desired effect on the audience when delivering a speech or presentation (Gogoi, 2015).

Volume

Volume refers to the loudness or softness of the voice. When one is presenting, one should not be too soft or too loud. If the speaker's voice is too soft, the message may not be conveyed effectively because the audience may not be able to hear it, which can reduce their motivation to listen. In contrast, the speaker should not shout when presenting, as it can make the audience uncomfortable or afraid. The speaker can sound hostile and angry. Thus, according to Duklim and Musigrungsi (2018), speakers should use voice projection, which involves carrying one's voice as far as possible, to present effectively and be heard.

Speed

Pace refers to the speed at which spoken lines are delivered. Usually, the audience is exposed to the content for the first time and may find it new and unfamiliar (Duklim & Musigrungsi, 2018). So, when a speaker speaks too quickly, the audience may not be able to follow the presentation, which can lead to loss of information. In contrast, if the speaker speaks too slowly,

the audience may become bored or impatient, and their attention may wander. Consequently, the speaker should speak at an appropriate pace so that the audience can receive the intended message. Speed can also lead others to form impressions about the speaker's emotional state, credibility, and intelligence. For example, a speaker who is tired may speak slowly, whereas an excited speaker may talk quickly.

Tone

Tone refers to the mood or quality of the voice, which plays a crucial role in expressing emotions. Delivering oral presentations helps presenters adjust the tone of their voice so that the message is delivered more clearly and attractively (Rizqi & Haryanto, 2024). Varying the tone is important to avoid monotony, as a monotone delivery can lead to boredom and reduced audience interest. Using different tones makes communication more lively, impactful, and effective. However, if tone is not used correctly, the intended message may be misinterpreted or lost.

Pitch

Pitch refers to the highness or lowness of a person's voice. Neuliep (2020) states that people can express emotions such as anger or sadness by changing their pitch. However, without the correct pitch, the meaning of what they say can be misunderstood. Additionally, when someone rarely changes their pitch, their voice is described as monotone. In oral presentations, similar to tone, a monotonous delivery can make the presentation boring.

Oral Presentations

Oral presentations are a common practice among university students, as they are an integral part of the teaching and learning process. They have also become increasingly popular as a form of assessment, whether individually or in groups (Al Harun et al., 2016; Tian & Mahmud, 2018). This is particularly true for graduate students, for whom oral presentations are not only a key coursework requirement but also essential for presenting at conferences and defending proposals and theses (Tian & Mahmud, 2018). Oral presentations also help students communicate and present effectively before entering the working world (Bhattacharyya & Sargunan, 2009; Al Harun et al., 2016). However, Iksan et al. (2011) found that students' ability to present ideas verbally showed a lower mean compared to other communication skills, indicating that presentation skills remain an area that requires further development. Therefore, increasing students' awareness of both verbal and nonverbal communication is important to help them deliver more effective oral presentations.

Past Studies on Nonverbal Communication and Oral Presentations

Previous studies have examined the role of nonverbal communication in oral presentations among university students. Rahmat et al. (2019) investigated students' perceptions regarding the use of kinesics and vocalics in oral presentations. Data were collected from 50 university

students who had completed an oral presentation course through a survey. The findings revealed that most respondents, especially male students, knew how to use kinesics. However, both male and female students still needed to further understand the use of kinesics in oral presentations to fully utilize it. Similarly, students also needed to further improve the use of vocalics in oral presentations. This highlights the importance of students understanding nonverbal cues in delivering effective oral presentations. However, the study focused on students who had completed an oral presentation course, which may represent students with more exposure to presentation practices.

Moreover, Al Harun et al. (2016) conducted a study at Green University of Bangladesh to investigate the English presentation skills and challenges faced by first-semester undergraduate students from various disciplines (Social Science and Science). Data were primarily gathered by evaluating the oral presentations of more than 120 students. Interviews with some faculty members were also conducted to identify the challenges in oral presentations and suggest possible solutions. The results indicate that the presenters' facial expressions reflected their overall level of preparation, while their eye contact was a strong indicator of confidence. Those who practised in advance and took the oral presentations seriously were able to maintain eye contact with both the lecturer and the audience, displayed positive body language, and successfully presented their topics with clarity. In contrast, students who struggled with speaking or oral communication in English frequently stumbled during their presentations, revealing a lack of preparation. Another significant finding was that some students relied heavily on their PowerPoint slides and read them word for word, which limited their use of body language and hindered their ability to engage the audience. Consequently, they failed to establish a connection with the audience. While this study provides valuable insights into observable presentation behaviours, it focused mainly on the evaluation of students' performance rather than students' own perceptions of their nonverbal communication use.

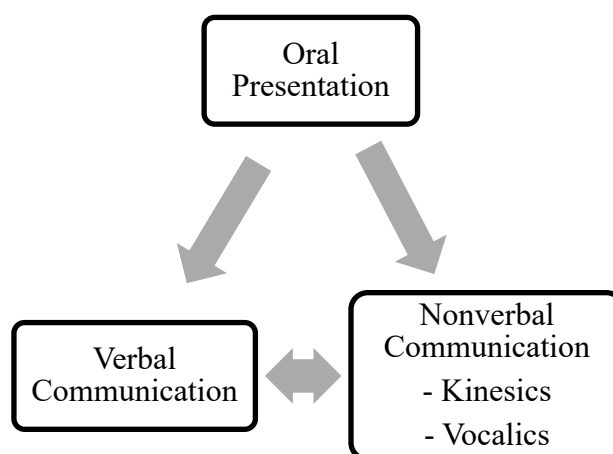
Additionally, a study was conducted in Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP), Malaysia, with the objectives of gathering stakeholders' views on effective communication skills and presenter attribute requirements in technical oral presentations (Bhattacharyya & Sargunan, 2009). The respondents of this study were 200 final-year engineering students who were invited to complete a survey. From this group, some students were selected for semi-structured interviews to provide further in-depth explanations of their views on communicative competence in technical oral presentations. In terms of nonverbal communication, the findings showed that the three most important aspects are rate/pace, appearing extemporaneous, and volume. In other words, rate/pace and volume belong to the vocalics category, while appearing extemporaneous belongs to the kinesics category. These findings highlight the importance of vocalics and kinesics in professional presentation contexts. These findings can help lecturers understand the aspects required for the successful delivery of technical oral presentations and can prepare students for the workplace. However, the study focused on technical oral presentations and workplace-related requirements, rather than students' general perceptions of their own use of nonverbal communication.

In summary, oral presentations are an essential component of tertiary education and require both verbal and nonverbal communication for effective message delivery. Previous studies have established the importance of nonverbal communication in oral presentations. However, most have focused on presentation performance, required presenter attributes, or students with specific presentation training. Limited attention has been given to students' perceptions of their own use of kinesics and vocalics, particularly among Malaysian undergraduates. Therefore, this study extends previous research by exploring students' perceptions of kinesics and vocalics during oral presentations.

Conceptual Framework

Effective oral presentations involve the integration of verbal and nonverbal communication. While verbal communication conveys the content of a presentation, nonverbal communication supports message delivery through physical and vocal cues. Based on the framework of nonverbal communication proposed by Neuliep (2020), this study focuses on two components, namely kinesics and vocalics. The conceptual framework explores students' perceptions of the use of kinesics and vocalics in oral presentations. Kinesics is examined through four elements: posture, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. Meanwhile, vocalics is examined through four elements: volume, speed, tone, and pitch. These elements provide the basis for understanding how students perceive their own use of nonverbal communication during oral presentations.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study



Methodology

The research design of this study was a descriptive survey. This quantitative study was conducted to examine students' perceptions of nonverbal communication, specifically kinesics and vocalics, in oral presentation settings.

A total of 42 undergraduate students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, participated in the study. All participants were first-year engineering students. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience in delivering oral

presentations. This ensured that all respondents had relevant exposure to the phenomenon under investigation.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from Rahmat et al. (2019) and Gogoi (2015) (Table 1). The instrument was slightly modified to suit the context of the current study. The questionnaire consisted of four sections with a total of 29 items. Section A covered the demographic profile and consisted of three items. Respondents were required to select the most appropriate answers. Section B focused on kinesics and consisted of 12 items, while Section C focused on vocalics and also consisted of 12 items. Both sections used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Section D contained two open-ended questions. Students were asked to report additional nonverbal communication behaviours used during oral presentations and explain the reasons for their use.

Table 1: Distribution of Items in Survey

Section	Variable	No. of Items
A	Demographic Profile	3
B	Kinesics	12
C	Vocalics	12
D	Open-ended	2
Total No. of Items		29

Data were collected using a Google Form distributed to the selected participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

The overall internal consistency reliability of the 24 Likert-scale items was measured using Cronbach's alpha. The overall reliability coefficient was .709, indicating acceptable internal consistency for the questionnaire items used in this study (Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items (Kinesics & Vocalics)
.709	24

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to analyse the data. Open-ended responses were analysed thematically by reading the responses several times, identifying recurring ideas, grouping similar responses into categories, and developing themes based on the patterns found in the data.

Results

Demographic Profile

Table 3 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The sample was evenly distributed by gender, with 50% males ($n = 21$) and 50% females ($n = 21$). The respondents were from Civil Engineering (23.8%, $n = 10$), Electrical Engineering (23.8%, $n = 10$), and Chemical Engineering (52.4%, $n = 22$). Most respondents perceived themselves as having average proficiency level (81%) in English, followed by good proficiency level (11.9%) and weak proficiency level (7.1%). This indicates that the majority of participants reported moderate English proficiency.

Table 3: Demographic Profile

No.	Variables	Item	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	21	50.0
		Female	21	50.0
2	Programme	Civil Engineering	10	23.8
		Electrical Engineering	10	23.8
		Chemical Engineering	22	52.4
3	Proficiency	Weak	3	7.1
		Average	34	81.0
		Good	5	11.9

Kinesics

This section presents data to answer Research Question 1: How do students perceive the use of kinesics in oral presentations?

Table 4: Kinesics

NO	STATEMENT	MEAN	SD
1	I stand straight.	3.76	0.85
2	I lean against the wall.	2.64	1.20
3	I slump my shoulders.	2.80	1.04
4	I move my hands to emphasize what I say.	3.92	0.81
5	I move my hands a lot because I am nervous.	3.35	0.96
6	I nod or shake my head to show what I meant.	3.76	1.05
7	I make eye contact with the audience.	3.57	1.11
8	I look at the slides/ notes/ whiteboard/ computer.	3.90	0.79
9	I look up (at the ceiling) when I am thinking what to say.	3.04	1.08
10	I always smile when starts the oral presentations.	3.85	0.84
11	I show different facial expressions during oral presentations.	3.71	0.86
12	I do not have any expressions when presenting	2.12	0.89

Table 4 presents students' perceptions of kinesics in oral presentations, focusing on posture, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions.

Respondents reported generally positive posture during presentations, with moderate agreement that they stand straight when presenting ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.85$). Lower means were recorded for slumping shoulders ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.04$) and leaning against the wall ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.20$).

Gestures were among the more frequently reported kinesics behaviours. Respondents indicated frequent use of hand movements to emphasize speech ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.81$) and head movements such as nodding and shaking to convey meaning ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.05$). However, some respondents also reported using hand movements due to nervousness ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.96$).

In terms of eye contact, the findings show a moderate level of eye contact with the audience ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.11$). However, respondents reported a higher tendency to look at slides, notes, the whiteboard, or the computer during presentations ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.79$). Some also reported looking upward when trying to recall information ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.08$).

For facial expressions, the respondents reported that they always smiled at the beginning of the presentations ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.84$) and showed different expressions during delivery ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.86$). The lowest mean was recorded for having no facial expressions during presentations ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 0.89$).

Overall, the findings indicate that respondents demonstrate moderate use of kinesics during oral presentations. Gestures and facial expressions were relatively more frequently used, while posture was generally maintained at an acceptable level. However, eye contact with the audience was comparatively lower.

Vocalics

This section presents data to answer Research Question 2: How do students perceive the use of vocalics in oral presentations?

Table 5: Vocalics

NO	STATEMENT	MEAN	SD
1	My voice is loud.	3.50	0.77
2	My voice is soft.	2.95	0.90
3	I shout when presenting.	2.17	0.76
4	I mumble when presenting.	2.64	1.08
5	I speak fast.	3.17	0.91
6	I speak slow.	2.67	0.79
7	I pause a lot.	3.29	0.89
8	I am monotonous.	2.86	0.87
9	I use different tones to show my emotion when presenting.	3.45	0.92
10	I raise my pitch when excited.	3.52	1.06
11	I increase my pitch to indicate starting point.	3.24	0.98
12	I lower my pitch to indicate the ending.	3.31	0.84

Table 5 illustrates students' perceptions of vocalics in oral presentations in terms of volume, speed, tone, and pitch.

The findings indicated that respondents generally perceived their voices as loud ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.77$), while showing low agreement that they shouted during presentations ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.76$). They also showed a relatively low tendency to perceive themselves as mumbling ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.08$), while perceptions of speaking softly were moderate ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.90$).

As for pitch, respondents reported increasing their pitch when excited ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.06$), lowering their pitch to indicate the conclusion of a presentation ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.84$), and increasing their pitch to indicate the beginning of a presentation ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.98$).

Respondents also reported using different tones to express emotion ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.92$), while being less likely to describe their delivery as monotonous ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.87$).

Regarding speaking rate, respondents perceived themselves as speaking at a relatively faster pace ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.91$) rather than a slower pace ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 0.79$). Additionally, respondents reported pausing during presentations ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.89$).

Overall, the results suggest that respondents perceived their vocal characteristics during presentations at a moderate level.

Open-Ended Responses

The analysis of open-ended responses was based on 23 participants who provided additional qualitative feedback regarding their use of nonverbal communication during oral presentations. Four themes emerged from the thematic analysis of responses.

Theme 1: Kinesics Behaviours in Oral Presentations

Respondents reported using various kinesic behaviours such as facial expressions, gestures, posture adjustments, eye contact avoidance, and hand movements during oral presentations. These behaviours were either intentional or naturally occurring during speaking tasks.

“Yes, I raise my eyebrows when I ask a question or when I can’t hear what the person is saying.” (R2)

“Changing my body posture.” (R8)

“Often avoid eye contact and keep my handgrip together when presenting and seldom use hand gestures.” (R27)

These findings indicate that kinesic behaviours were commonly present in respondents' oral presentation practices.

Theme 2: Enhancing Communication Effectiveness

Respondents reported that nonverbal communication helps improve message clarity, emphasize spoken content, and engage the audience. It was also used to attract attention and support understanding during presentations.

“To emphasise what I’m saying and to make sure the information I’m trying to deliver is understood by listeners.” (R2)

“To make sure my audience understand and pay attention to my presentation.” (R12)

“For my classmates to understand me better.” (R15)

“To make my presentation more interesting and not bored for audience.” (R4)

These responses suggest that respondents perceive nonverbal communication as a tool to strengthen verbal delivery and enhance audience engagement.

Theme 3: Confidence and Anxiety Management

Respondents reported that nonverbal communication helps them feel more confident, reduce nervousness, and improve fluency during oral presentations. Some also highlighted the role of personal appearance in increasing confidence.

“To feel confident while speaking in front.” (R30)

“We do use nonverbal cues in oral presentation because when we move, we seem to make body signals to make us more confident.” (R22)

“It helps me to remember suitable words and helps me to speak smoothly.” (R20)

“To help with my nervousness.” (R28)

“Personal appearance makes me more confident during oral presentation.” (R10)

These findings indicate that nonverbal communication serves both communicative and psychological functions in oral presentations.

Theme 4: Limited Use or Lack of Knowledge of Nonverbal Communication

A small number of respondents reported limited or no use of nonverbal communication due to nervousness or lack of knowledge on how to apply it effectively.

“I do not use it because I don’t know how to do it.” (R36)

“I rarely used nonverbal cues because I often feel so nervous that I forget my points.” (R5)

These responses suggest that some respondents may require additional guidance and training in using nonverbal communication during presentations.

Discussion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Students in this study demonstrated awareness of the use of nonverbal communication, specifically kinesics and vocalics, during oral presentations. Kinesics consists of posture, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. Gestures were the most frequently used behaviour, particularly when used to emphasize points. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Tian and Mahmud (2018), in which interviewees recognized that hand gestures are necessary for better oral presentations. Gestures can reinforce what the presenter says and make it easier for the audience to understand the information presented. Additionally, Aripin et al. (2020) found that gestures help presenters become more confident and explain content more effectively.

However, ineffective gestures were also reported, such as moving hands due to nervousness. Although the mean is slightly lower than the previous statement, it still indicates a noticeable behaviour pattern in this study. This may suggest that some students use gestures unconsciously as a coping mechanism for anxiety during presentations rather than as a deliberate communication strategy. This is further supported by Rahmat et al. (2019), which found that students increase gestural behaviour when feeling nervous. Such behaviour may also occur habitually or as a strategy to divert attention away from the speaker's face during presentations (Tian & Mahmud, 2018). Consequently, although gestures can enhance delivery, inappropriate or uncontrolled movements may lead to misalignment between speech and body language.

Furthermore, eye contact is an issue that needs to be addressed. Although respondents reported looking at the audience, they showed a higher tendency to look at slides or other devices, suggesting reliance on visual aids that may reduce audience engagement. This pattern may be explained by students' dependence on presentation materials to avoid forgetting content, particularly when confidence is low or preparation is insufficient. It may also reflect limited experience in delivering presentations without reading support, especially among first-year students who are still developing their presentation skills. This finding aligns with Tian and Mahmud (2018), who reported that students with higher anxiety often relied on slides rather than maintaining eye contact. Similarly, Al Harun et al. (2016) found that some students relied heavily on PowerPoint slides, which limited their engagement with the audience.

Vocalics include volume, speed, tone, and pitch. It is reported that respondents are generally aware of these vocal characteristics, with pitch being the most recognized, followed by volume, tone, and speed. These findings are consistent with Rahmat et al. (2019), which suggested that respondents are knowledgeable about using pitch and tone to make oral presentations more engaging. However, the results contrast with a study by Bhattacharyya and Sargunan (2009), where respondents rated pace as the most important factor. One possible explanation for the moderate variation in vocalics use is that students in this study may rely more on natural speaking patterns rather than consciously controlling vocal features such as tone and pitch.

Without formal training or repeated practice, students may use vocal variation instinctively rather than strategically during presentations.

The analysis of open-ended responses showed that students viewed nonverbal communication as an important part of oral presentations. It was mainly used as a communication support tool to improve message clarity, emphasize points, and help the audience understand the message better. Students also used nonverbal cues to build confidence and reduce nervousness during presentations, showing that these cues served both communicative and psychological functions. However, some students reported limited use of nonverbal communication due to a lack of knowledge or uncertainty in applying it effectively, indicating a gap in presentation skills development among undergraduates.

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

The findings of this study have significant theoretical implications within the framework of nonverbal communication (Neuliep, 2020). Students in this study were aware of and recognized the importance of the nonverbal cues used during presentations, specifically kinesics and vocalics. The study also has conceptual implications within the broader framework of verbal and nonverbal communication, as both forms are essential for effective oral presentations (Rahmat et al., 2019).

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study provide insights for both students and educators in improving oral presentation practices. Although the findings are based on the perceptions of 42 first-year engineering students, they highlight areas that may be considered when developing students' nonverbal communication skills. For students, awareness of their use of kinesics and vocalics may help them identify areas that require improvement. Meanwhile, educators may use these findings to guide students in developing more effective oral presentation skills.

The findings indicate that students frequently use gestures during presentations. However, these gestures may be either effective or distracting depending on how they are applied. Therefore, educators may guide students in differentiating between gestures that reinforce the intended message and gestures that may distract the audience or reflect nervousness. Educators may also use examples of effective oral presentations or videos to demonstrate appropriate gesture use.

In addition, classroom activities such as charades may be used to strengthen kinesics, particularly gestures and facial expressions. Charades is a game in which a player acts out a word or phrase without speaking, and their team tries to guess what it is within a time limit. The categories of words or phrases may include movies, books, animals, actions, or famous people. Through this activity, students communicate meanings through body movements

without relying on verbal communication, which may help them become more aware of their nonverbal expressions.

Since the findings show that students tend to look more at slides, notes, or other devices compared to the audience, educators may encourage students to reduce their reliance on presentation materials. Students may be encouraged to practice beforehand and become more familiar with their content, allowing them to maintain better eye contact during presentations. Simple techniques, such as maintaining eye contact with different sections of the room for several seconds before shifting attention naturally, may also support better audience engagement.

Regarding vocalics, the findings suggest that students are aware of using tone and pitch variation rather than delivering presentations monotonously. Educators may incorporate activities that develop intonation and expressive delivery to further improve audience engagement. Outside the classroom, students may also record and review their own presentations to increase awareness of their vocal variation.

Overall, mock presentations involving feedback from educators and peers may further support the development of students' nonverbal communication skills. A checklist focusing on kinesics and vocalics can be used to provide structured feedback and help students identify areas for improvement.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that students perceived themselves as aware of their nonverbal behaviour during oral presentations, with gestures receiving the highest mean scores and lack of facial expressions recording the lowest. Nonverbal cues play an important role in enhancing presentation effectiveness and audience engagement (Rahmat et al., 2019). Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of nonverbal communication in oral presentations by highlighting undergraduate students' perceptions of kinesics and vocalics within the Malaysian tertiary education context. However, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study, as the sample consisted of 42 first-year engineering students from a single university and may not represent all university students.

For future research, it is suggested that a larger number of participants should be included to improve the generalisability of findings, as the present study involved only 42 students from one institution. Additionally, future researchers may include interviews alongside questionnaire responses to gain deeper insights into students' perceptions and understand the reasons behind their responses. Classroom observations during oral presentations may also be conducted to examine the actual use of nonverbal communication behaviours. These approaches may contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between students' perceptions of nonverbal communication and their actual application during oral presentations.

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