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Reconceptualizing Presentation Pedagogy in EFL Contexts: A Multimodal Communication Approach

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ABSTRACT

This article explored the reconceptualization of presentation pedagogy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts by integrating multimodal communication strategies. Grounded in multimodal theory and communication style frameworks, the study investigated how combining linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modes enhanced students' presentation competencies. Using a mixed-methods research design involving classroom observations, video analyses, and survey data, the study focused on sixth-semester EFL students at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Walisongo Semarang. The findings revealed that students who employed multimodal strategies performed more effectively, displaying increased clarity, engagement, confidence, and audience interaction. The article argued for a pedagogical shift in EFL presentation instruction, emphasizing the need to embed multimodal competence in curricula to meet the communicative demands of contemporary global contexts.



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INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of language education, the need for communicative competence that transcends verbal expression is more pressing than ever. Presentations have become a cornerstone of academic success and professional performance. However, in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, instruction continues to privilege linguistic accuracy over holistic communication (Barabar & Caganaga, 2015; Afdaliah, 2022). As global communication norms shift toward dynamic, multimodal expression, language educators are called to reconsider how presentation skills are taught (Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Barrett & Liu, 2016).

In evaluating the current state of EFL presentation pedagogy, a SWOT analysis reveals both strengths and limitations in instructional design and implementation. One of the key strengths lies in the strong emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, which provides students with a firm grasp of verbal communication (Barrett & Liu, 2016; Omotedani & Sannomiya, 2023).

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Students are generally trained to prepare well-organized, linear verbal content, and most EFL curricula incorporate frameworks that support oral practice (Ja'afar, et al, 2021) and academic speaking (Crawford Camiciottoli & Campoy-Cubillo, 2018). However, the system also suffers from notable weaknesses. There is a significant lack of training in non-verbal communication strategies such as gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions (Barabar & Caganaga, 2015; Afdaliah, 2022). Additionally, visual literacy including skills in slide design, image use, and data presentation is seldom taught systematically (Altas, 2014; Lirola, 2020). As a result, students are often evaluated only on their verbal abilities, while their use of visual and physical cues remains unaddressed, creating a gap in holistic communicative competence (Busa, 2015).

Opportunities exist for transforming this landscape. The growing availability of digital tools and multimedia platforms creates a fertile ground for the integration of multimodal learning strategies (Anis & Khan, 2023; Muntaha et al., 2023; Ariffin, et al, 2021). Students and educators are increasingly exposed to global examples of effective presentation practices, such as TED Talks, which emphasize the value of visual and gestural expression alongside verbal content (Marskawati, 2018; Morell & Pastor Cesteros, 2018). Furthermore, many educational institutions are adopting 21st-century skills into their learning outcomes, which include communication, collaboration, and creative expression principles that align with multimodal instruction (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Hellwig et al., 2022). Nonetheless, these opportunities are tempered by ongoing threats. The entrenched reliance on traditional, text-focused language instruction continues to impede innovation (Jewitt, 2008; Ganapathy, 2016). Many educators remain unfamiliar with multimodal frameworks, and some teaching contexts lack the technological resources required to implement such pedagogies effectively (Sakulprasertsri, 2020; Mohamed, 2023). These challenges must be addressed if multimodal communication is to be fully embraced within EFL education. In conclusion, the SWOT analysis underscores a pressing need to reconceptualize EFL presentation instruction. While current practices provide a solid linguistic foundation, they fall short of preparing students for the dynamic, multimodal nature of real-world communication. By integrating linguistic, visual, and gestural modes into pedagogy, educators can equip learners with a more comprehensive communicative toolkit one that enhances not only clarity and engagement but also student confidence and competence in diverse speaking contexts.

Several studies have supported the pedagogical potential of multimodal strategies. For instance, Anis and Khan (2023) emphasized the importance of inclusive education frameworks that integrate multimodal resources to support learner diversity. Altas (2014) showed that a multimedia environment enhances student engagement and understanding of literature through multimodal presentation. Multimodal communication is a concept grounded in the understanding that meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes. Kress (2010) defines multimodality as the use of several modes to represent ideas, including language, image, gesture, and spatial configuration. In educational contexts, this framework enables learners to engage more deeply with content and express ideas more effectively. In the domain of language education, scholars have emphasized the pedagogical potential of multimodality (Walsh, 2018; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Zaki, et.al, 2008). Arola, Sheppard, and Ball (2014) identify five core communicative modes: linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial. Each plays a distinct role in facilitating comprehension, enhancing emotional connection, and structuring discourse. Multimodal instruction, therefore, supports differentiated learning and fosters the communicative flexibility necessary in multilingual and multicultural settings.

Despite these advantages, traditional EFL presentation instruction tends to focus on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, often overlooking non-verbal and visual aspects. This narrow approach limits students' ability to connect with audiences and present ideas with impact. Multimodal approaches offer a way to broaden the scope of presentation pedagogy and cultivate more adaptable and expressive communicators. Drawing on empirical data from a case study at UIN Walisongo Semarang, this study explores how integrating multimodal strategies especially

linguistic, visual, and gestural modes can enhance presentation effectiveness and communicative confidence among EFL learners. The analysis is grounded in contemporary multimodal pedagogy and responds to recent calls for innovation in English language teaching (Fatwassani et al., 2022; Crawford Camiciottoli & Campoy-Cubillo, 2018).

This paper proposes a reconceptualization of presentation pedagogy in EFL contexts by embracing a multimodal communication approach. Rather than treating verbal, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial elements as peripheral, this framework positions them as essential components of meaning-making (Arola, Sheppard, & Ball, 2014; Baldry & Thibault, 2006). Gestures, in particular, serve a dual function of supporting both communication and cognition, enhancing speaker clarity and listener comprehension (Arslan, 2023; Arslan et al., 2023). This study focused on these research questions: 1) How do EFL students incorporate multimodal elements linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial into their presentations?, 2) In what ways does multimodal communication improve clarity, engagement, and expressiveness in EFL presentations?, 3) How can EFL pedagogy be restructured to better support multimodal presentation skills?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a concurrent embedded mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the research problem. This design allowed the researchers to explore students' multimodal presentation practices in-depth while also capturing perceptions and measurable outcomes through structured instruments. The participants were five EFL students in their sixth semester at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Walisongo Semarang. These students were purposefully selected based on their enrollment in the "Digital Literacies and Multimodality in Education" course. They were chosen for their exposure to multimodal theory and practice, as well as their willingness to engage in reflective and project-based learning.

To capture the multifaceted nature of students' multimodal presentations, data were collected from four primary sources:

- **Observations:** Classroom sessions were video-recorded with the consent of the participants. Each presentation session was approximately 15–20 minutes, followed by peer and instructor feedback. Observation notes focused on verbal fluency, use of body language, visual aid quality, and audience interaction.
- **Video Analysis:** The recorded presentations were analyzed to identify the application of the five multimodal modes linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial. The researchers used a coding scheme adapted from Kress (2010) and Bezemer and Kress (2016) to categorize and interpret students' communicative behaviors.
- **Questionnaires:** After the presentation sessions, structured Likert-scale questionnaires were distributed to the five presenters, their peers (n=10), and two instructors. The survey assessed perceptions of effectiveness, clarity, confidence, visual aid impact, and audience engagement. Ratings ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
- **Reflective Journals:** Each participant submitted a reflective journal consisting of two entries: one after preparing for the presentation and one after delivering it. These reflections were guided by prompts that encouraged students to discuss the challenges they faced, the strategies they used, and the impact of multimodal elements on their performance.

Qualitative data from observations, video analysis, and reflective journals were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach. Codes were generated inductively, allowing key themes to emerge related to multimodal integration, audience response, and speaker development. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean scores and frequency counts) to quantify perceptions of presentation quality. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings offered a holistic view of how multimodal strategies influenced EFL presentation effectiveness.

RESULT

To address the first research question how EFL students incorporate multimodal elements the study observed the use of linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modes during student presentations. Each mode played a distinct role in supporting the message and shaping audience perception.

Use of Linguistic Mode: Students demonstrated a marked improvement in speech organization and clarity. They employed discourse markers such as “first,” “next,” “in conclusion,” and “as a result” to sequence their arguments logically. Their vocabulary choices reflected academic tone, with efforts made to paraphrase technical language for better accessibility. Some students also employed repetition to emphasize key points. Questionnaire responses revealed that 90% of audience members found linguistic clarity to be the most important aspect for understanding content. These results affirm that the linguistic mode formed the foundation of communication, providing structure and coherence.

Use of Visual Mode: Visual elements such as PowerPoint slides, infographics, bar charts, and images were used to illustrate and reinforce spoken content. Students applied basic design principles like contrast, alignment, and minimalism to increase clarity. In one instance, a student used a pie chart to visually compare student preferences across learning styles, enhancing audience comprehension. According to feedback, presentations that incorporated meaningful visuals were rated significantly higher in engagement. This supports the finding that visual aids serve as scaffolding tools that help anchor abstract ideas in tangible forms.

Use of Aural Mode: The aural mode was expressed through vocal variation changes in pitch, tone, volume, and pacing. Students strategically paused after key points, altered tone for emphasis, and slowed speech when presenting difficult concepts. Reflective journals indicated that using voice modulation not only maintained audience attention but also helped presenters manage anxiety. The deliberate use of silence especially before a transition or final message proved effective in guiding listener focus.

Use of Gestural Mode: Gestures played a powerful role in enhancing expressiveness. Students used hand movements to show contrast (e.g., “on one hand... on the other”), trace timelines, or depict growth and movement. Facial expressions aligned with tone smiling to show enthusiasm, nodding for agreement, or raising eyebrows to suggest surprise. Observations revealed that speakers who used gestures congruent with their speech were rated as more confident and relatable. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that gesture-speech integration reinforces verbal meaning (Afdaliah, 2022; Arslan, 2023).

Use of Spatial Mode: Students did not remain static during presentations. They walked to different parts of the classroom, approached visuals when explaining them, and adjusted body orientation to address various audience members. These spatial movements created a more dynamic presentation atmosphere and reduced psychological distance between speaker and listener. Viewers reported that this increased their sense of inclusion and interaction.

Addressing the second research question, the study found that multimodal communication substantially enhanced clarity, engagement, and expressiveness in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student presentations. The integration of multiple communicative modes linguistic, visual, gestural, vocal, and spatial worked synergistically to enrich the overall communicative impact beyond what verbal language alone could achieve.

Linguistic clarity was notably strengthened through the strategic use of visual aids. These aids served as cognitive anchors that translated abstract or complex ideas into more concrete, understandable forms. For instance, one student’s presentation on climate change featured a well-curated sequence of images depicting melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and extreme weather

patterns. This visual storytelling enabled the audience to better visualize and emotionally connect with the severity and urgency of climate issues, thereby deepening comprehension and retention.

Gestures synchronized closely with spoken words played a critical role in reinforcing the intended meaning and projecting speaker confidence. For example, a student discussing the growth of digital learning used upward hand movements to symbolize expansion and progress. Such physical gestures provided non-verbal cues that complemented and amplified verbal messages, helping listeners decode content more intuitively.

Vocal variation including changes in pitch, volume, and tempo helped capture and sustain audience attention while emphasizing important points. Students frequently lowered their voice to create suspense before delivering key information or raised it when highlighting critical arguments, effectively using voice modulation as a tool to guide listener focus. Moreover, strategic pauses before conclusions or major points allowed the audience moments to process information and anticipate what was coming next, enhancing overall comprehension.

Spatial movement within the presentation space emerged as another vital multimodal element that boosted engagement. One student, for example, deliberately moved from the center of the classroom to the side when transitioning between topics, subtly signaling a shift in focus to the audience. This physical dynamism disrupted the monotony of stationary speaking and provided a visual cue that kept the audience visually and mentally engaged.

Further evidence came from reflective journal entries and post-presentation surveys, which revealed that students felt a greater sense of autonomy and reduced reliance on rote memorization when employing multimodal strategies. The ability to express ideas through multiple channels allowed students to communicate more naturally and confidently, fostering authentic interaction rather than mechanical recitation.

Peer and instructor feedback consistently highlighted that students who fluently integrated at least three modes such as combining academic language with minimal-text slides and consistent hand gestures received higher evaluations for both clarity and engagement. One notable example included a student whose presentation was praised for its clear structure, effective use of visuals, and dynamic body language, underscoring the complementary function of each mode: linguistic elements conveyed content, visuals illustrated it concretely, gestures and vocal tone communicated emotion and emphasis, and spatial movement maintained audience attention.

These findings align well with previous research by Barabar and Caganaga (2015), Busa (2015), and Arslan et al. (2023), which emphasizes the critical role of non-verbal cues and visual design in enhancing message delivery. Their work similarly argues that multimodal elements help reduce the cognitive load on both speakers and listeners by distributing communicative effort across several channels, thereby facilitating smoother and more effective communication.

Regarding the third research question how EFL pedagogy can be restructured to better support multimodal presentation skills the study suggests a fundamental pedagogical shift is necessary. Instead of focusing solely on language accuracy and grammar, EFL instruction should adopt a multimodal performance model that explicitly incorporates training in visual design, vocal modulation, meaningful gestures, and effective spatial movement.

Practical recommendations include integrating video analysis of presentations so students can self-assess their multimodal use and observe effective techniques modeled by peers and instructors. Embedding peer feedback sessions encourages collaborative reflection on multimodal strategies, while performance rehearsals scaffold students' ability to coordinate multiple communicative modes under realistic conditions.

Equally important is teacher professional development: instructors need targeted training to understand and apply multimodal pedagogical principles, as well as assessment tools such as

multimodal rubrics that evaluate students holistically across verbal, visual, gestural, vocal, and spatial domains.

Ultimately, the research highlights that empowering students with multimodal communication skills fosters not only clearer and more engaging presentations but also greater confidence and communicative competence. These outcomes resonate with global trends advocating for integrated multimodal pedagogy as essential preparation for the complex communication demands of the 21st century where digital, interpersonal, and professional interactions increasingly rely on multimodal literacy.

DISCUSSION

In response to the first research question, EFL students incorporated multimodal elements by actively combining linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial modes to enhance their presentation delivery. Linguistically, students structured their speech using academic discourse markers and topic-relevant vocabulary, enabling clear and coherent verbal communication. Visually, they utilized well-designed slides and graphical elements to reinforce and visualize key points. Aural modulation was used to guide audience attention through variations in tone, pace, and emphasis. Gesturally, students relied on hand movements and facial expressions to support and accentuate their verbal message, while spatial movements helped to dynamically engage the audience and reduce psychological distance. This integration of modes reflects a growing awareness among learners of the performative and visual dimensions of communication, affirming previous research that students' communicative impact increases when multimodal strategies are consciously applied (Altas, 2014; Marskawati et al., 2019; Afdaliah, 2022).

Addressing the second research question, multimodal communication significantly improved clarity, engagement, and expressiveness in EFL presentations. Linguistic clarity was bolstered by visual aids that anchored abstract content in tangible forms. Gestures synchronized with speech helped to reinforce meaning and convey confidence, while vocal variation captured attention and highlighted key transitions. As a result, presentations were perceived by audiences as more compelling and professional. Reflective journal entries and post-presentation surveys confirmed that students felt more in control and less dependent on memorization, as multimodal strategies allowed them to express themselves more freely and naturally. These outcomes align with findings from Barabar and Caganaga (2015), Busa (2015), and Arslan et al. (2023), who emphasize that non-verbal cues and visual design enhance message delivery and reduce cognitive load for both speaker and listener.

In light of the third research question, the study underscores the urgent need for pedagogical restructuring in EFL contexts to better support multimodal presentation skills. Current instructional practices often focus narrowly on linguistic accuracy, overlooking the expressive power of gesture, visual design, and spatial movement (Jewitt, 2008; Suwastini et al., 2021). To bridge this gap, teachers must incorporate multimodal communication frameworks into their lesson plans, provide modeling of effective multimodal presentations, and offer structured opportunities for rehearsal and peer feedback. Tools such as video recording, reflective journaling, and multimodal assessment rubrics can scaffold learners' awareness and skill development (Fatwassani et al., 2022; Anis & Khan, 2023).

Moreover, educators should be trained in multimodal pedagogy to guide students effectively and evaluate performance across diverse communicative dimensions. As highlighted by Kalantzis and Cope (2012), integrating multiliteracies into language teaching not only equips students with practical communication tools but also fosters creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability key competencies for 21st-century learners. Overall, this study affirms that multimodal competence is a vital dimension of communicative competence and should be a core focus of EFL presentation instruction going forward.

CONCLUSION

This study provides comprehensive evidence that incorporating multimodal elements linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial into EFL student presentations contributes significantly to communicative effectiveness. In response to the first research question, it was observed that students adopted these modes with increasing confidence, using speech to structure ideas, visuals to clarify concepts, voice modulation to signal emphasis, gestures to illustrate meaning, and spatial movement to engage their audience. These findings confirm that EFL students are capable of integrating multimodal strategies when given the appropriate support and instructional guidance.

Regarding the second research question, multimodal communication was found to improve clarity, engagement, and expressiveness. Students' delivery became more dynamic and comprehensible, and audiences responded more positively to the integrated presentation style. The synergy between verbal and non-verbal modes reduced reliance on memorization and supported authentic expression. These outcomes reinforce the argument that multimodality is essential for building communicative competence in the 21st-century classroom.

Finally, in addressing the third research question, the study advocates for a fundamental shift in EFL pedagogy. Educators must move beyond the traditional focus on linguistic accuracy and adopt instructional models that cultivate multimodal fluency. This includes training teachers in multimodal techniques, revising assessment criteria to include non-verbal performance indicators, and embedding multimodal tasks into the curriculum. By doing so, EFL programs will be better aligned with the real-world communication demands of global and digital environments, promoting inclusive, student-centered learning that prepares learners for authentic interaction in academic and professional contexts.

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