

# Vietnamese English major students' self-perceived nonverbal communication skills in presentations: Implications for teaching English oral presentations



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**Abstract** Nonverbal communication is a crucial component of an effective oral presentation, as it complements verbal communication to express attitudes, enhance audience engagement, and convey meaning. However, in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, nonverbal communication skills often receive limited instructional attention. This pedagogical imbalance limits students' ability to show confidence or enhance audience engagement through verbal and nonverbal messages during presentations. Therefore, to propose some pedagogical implications for teaching English oral presentations, this study investigates Vietnamese English major students' self-perceived nonverbal communication skills in English oral presentations. Using a quantitative design, data were collected from 153 English major students at a university in Vietnam through a structured questionnaire examining students' perceived importance and use of nonverbal strategies, self-assessed performance, and reasons for their evaluations. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyse the data. The results reveal that students hold positive perceptions of nonverbal communication and actively employ strategies such as vocal modulation and eye contact to enhance engagement and message clarity. However, their overall performance remains at a 'fair' level ( $M = 2.87$ ), indicating minor inconsistencies and errors in performance. Students identified fear of public speaking, lack of instructional guidance, limited English proficiency, and insufficient topic mastery as major barriers to effective nonverbal communication, while good topic mastery and regular practice were key factors contributing to success. These findings highlight the interplay between psychological, instructional, and linguistic factors influencing students' nonverbal communication performance. The study underscores the need for explicit instruction, guided practice, and reflective training in nonverbal communication within English major curricula to improve students' expressive and presentational competence.

**Keywords:** paralinguistics, body language, performing techniques, delivery practices, self-evaluation

## 1. Introduction

Nonverbal communication, which encompasses the use of nonverbal strategies such as appearance, gestures, posture, eye contact, facial expressions, and vocal modulation (Osborn et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2017), is a crucial component of an effective oral presentation, as it complements verbal communication to express attitudes, enhance audience engagement, or convey meaning (Heitzman et al., 2023; Burgoon et al., 2024). Scholars have emphasized that an effective presentation depends not only on presenters' verbal competence but also on their ability to use nonverbal cues strategically to enhance clarity, engagement, and credibility (Cingi et al., 2023; Halm, 2020). In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, although learners' nonverbal competence often compensates for limited English proficiency (Morell & Pastor Cesteros, 2018; Wang et al., 2023), learners' nonverbal communication skills are frequently underdeveloped because EFL instruction tends to prioritize English knowledge (grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary) and skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) while neglecting nonverbal aspects of communication. This pedagogical imbalance limits students' ability to show confidence or enhance audience engagement through verbal and nonverbal messages during presentations (Domínguez et al., 2024; Levasseur et al., 2021), and especially during online presentations, where effective nonverbal communication is considerably more difficult to achieve (Apridayani et al., 2024; Echigo et al., 2022). With respect to causes, recent studies have shown that students' fear of public speaking or presenting environments often hinders their ability to incorporate nonverbal strategies effectively in delivering presentations in English (Hashemi & Hokmabadi, 2011; Rencewigg & Joseph, 2024; Pérez Cavana, 2023; Morell & Pastor Cesteros, 2018). This aligns with broader findings that anxiety and cognitive overload reduce nonverbal expressiveness (Bin Abdulrahman & Darami, 2025). These studies suggest that targeted instruction and deliberate practice can improve learners' nonverbal communication skills, thereby strengthening their overall presentation performance (Ishikawa et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2023). This is consistent with the view that nonverbal decoding and production skills can be trained just like verbal skills (Gifford, 2010). Despite this, in Vietnamese EFL contexts, the explicit teaching of nonverbal communication skills remains limited, as these skills are often perceived as less important and therefore receive insufficient instructional attention within



English major curricula. Therefore, to inform the effective instruction of nonverbal communication in English oral presentations, it is essential to understand Vietnamese English-major students' perceptions of the importance of nonverbal skills, evaluate their actual performance, and identify the difficulties they encounter when employing nonverbal strategies. However, no existing research has examined these aspects collectively, thereby revealing a clear gap in the literature. To address this gap, this study aims to (1) examine Vietnamese English major students' perceived importance and use of nonverbal strategies in English oral presentations, (2) analyse their self-assessed performance, and (3) identify factors contributing to their low or high self-assessment. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do Vietnamese English major students perceive the importance and use of nonverbal communication strategies in English oral presentations?
- 2) How do they self-assess their nonverbal communication skills?
- 3) What factors contribute to their low or high self-assessment of nonverbal communication skills?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research design

This study employed a quantitative research design to systematically investigate Vietnamese English major students' self-perceived nonverbal communication skills in English oral presentations. This design was chosen because it offered a systematic and objective means of investigating the research problem. In particular, this study used a structured questionnaire that was developed on the basis of theories of nonverbal communication (Yalçın & Yalçın, 2010; Osborn et al., 2012; Hess, 2016; Turner et al., 2017; Yagi et al., 2022; Heitzman et al., 2023; Hess, 2023; Röhner & Schütz, 2023) and was piloted for clarity and validity. The questionnaire was designed to investigate students' perceptions of nonverbal communication in English oral presentations; their self-assessed competence in nonverbal skills—including voice, appearance, eye contact, facial expressions, movement, gestures, and posture—; and the reasons underlying their self-assessments. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to analyse the data on students' perceptions, self-assessments, and underlying reasons.

### 2.2. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of English major sophomores, juniors, and seniors at a university in Vietnam. These groups were selected because they had previous exposure to English presentation tasks. Specifically, the sophomore students had recently completed a course dedicated to presentation skills, whereas the junior and senior students had not only completed this course but also engaged in multiple presentation activities in other subjects during their later years of study. First-year students were not included in the study because they had not yet acquired sufficient experience with English oral presentations.

According to the university, the total population is approximately 1,014 students. Thus, to ensure that the sample mirrors the population, a random sample of 287 students was considered sufficient to yield reliable and representative results for the study. The sample size was determined via Yamane's (1967) formula, in which  $n$  represents the required sample size,  $N$  denotes the total population, and  $e$  indicates the acceptable margin of error.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} = \frac{1014}{1+1014(0.05)^2} = 287 \text{ students} \quad (1)$$

With respect to sampling, participants were selected via a convenience sampling method from the target population. In this sense, the questionnaire was distributed to all English major sophomores, juniors, and seniors; however, by the end of the data collection period, only 153 out of the 1,014 students consented to participate. Although the number of respondents was lower than the initial target, it still offers acceptable representation for descriptive survey research according to Yamane's (1967) sampling formula. Specifically, 153 respondents account for approximately 93% of the total population, corresponding to an estimated sampling error of 7.4%, which remains acceptable for descriptive survey studies. Additionally, following Cohen's (1992) guidelines, a sample of approximately 100–150 participants is typically sufficient to achieve 80% power for detecting medium-sized effects in survey-based behavioral research. Therefore, the final sample of 153 students can be considered adequate for generating reliable and robust descriptive estimates of students' self-perceived nonverbal communication skills.

With respect to the demographic characteristics of the participants, Table 1 shows that of the 153 English-major students who participated in the study, female students accounted for the majority (73.9%), whereas male students represented 25.5%, and 0.7% identified as other. In terms of living area, most participants came from urban areas (60.8%), followed by those from the countryside (37.3%), and a small proportion from remote areas (2%). In terms of academic year, 39.2% were second-year students, 19.6% were third-year students, and 41.2% were final-year students, indicating a fairly balanced distribution across cohorts. Concerning their English learning time, most students had studied English for 9–11 years (32%) or 12–14 years (32.7%), whereas smaller groups reported 6–8 years (15%), over 15 years (11.1%), and 3–5 years (9.2%) of learning. When asked to identify their strongest language skill, reading was most frequently reported (45.1%), followed by speaking (29.4%), listening

(20.9%), and writing (4.6%). Overall, this demographic distribution reflects a diverse group of English major students who possess considerable experience in English learning and presentation tasks. Although the participants were drawn from a single institution, their varied backgrounds in terms of gender, residence, and academic year render the sample reasonably representative of Vietnamese English major students in similar university contexts, particularly for exploring self-perceived nonverbal communication skills in English oral presentations.

**Table 1** Participant’s demographics (N=153).

Characteristics	Distribution (No.= %)
Gender	Male (39=25.5%), female (113=73.9%), other (1=0.7%)
Living area	Urban area (93=60.8%), countryside (57=37.3%), remote area (3=2%)
Academic year	Second-year student (60=39.2%), third-year student (30=19.6%), final-year student (63=41.2%)
English learning time	3-5 years (14=9.2%), 6-8 years (23=15%), 9-11 years (49=32%), 12-14 years (50=32.7%), over 15 years (17=11.1%)
Good skill	Listening (32=20.9%), speaking (45=29.4%), reading (69=45.1%), writing (7=4.6%)

### 2.3. Data collection instrument

As designed, data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire that was developed on the basis of theories of nonverbal communication in presentations (Osborn et al., 2012; Hess, 2016; Turner et al., 2017; Heitzman et al., 2023; Hess, 2023) to ensure that it covered key nonverbal elements (such as voice, appearance, eye contact, facial expressions, movement, gestures, and posture). The draft questionnaire underwent expert review and a pilot test to verify that the wording was clear and comprehensible to the participants. The final questionnaire was organized into four parts, each targeting a different aspect of the research focus. Specifically, in Part 1, participants’ demographic information, including gender, living area (urban, countryside, or remote area), academic year, English learning time, and self-identified strongest language skills (listening, speaking, reading, or writing), was collected. Part 2 was designed to explore how important participants consider nonverbal communication in presentations, which nonverbal elements they frequently employ and regard as most essential, and the reasons underlying their use of these elements. Collectively, these items captured both the perceived importance of nonverbal communication skills and the frequency and rationale behind participants’ use of specific nonverbal communication strategies. Part 3 aimed to assess how participants self-evaluate their competence in employing various nonverbal communication strategies—voice use, appearance, eye contact, facial expression, movement, and hand gestures/postures—in presentations. The participants rated their performance on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 5. Specifically, 0 (“Poor”) indicated a lack of knowledge or ability to employ the strategies; 1 (“Weak”) reflected limited or inaccurate use; 2 (“Limited”) denoted frequent errors or discomfort in use; 3 (“Fair”) represented partial competence with occasional errors; 4 (“Good”) indicated generally effective and natural use with minor imperfections; and 5 (“Excellent”) signified natural, strategic, and highly effective use. Clear descriptors for each scale point were provided in the questionnaire to ensure consistency and accuracy in self-assessment. Part 4 explored the underlying reasons for the participants’ self-evaluations. Those who rated their nonverbal communication skills as poor, weak, or limited were asked to reflect on the factors contributing to their difficulties, whereas those who rated themselves as fair, good, or excellent were prompted to identify the elements that facilitated their success.

### 2.4. Data collection procedure

Following the development of the questionnaire, data collection was carried out through an online survey via Google Forms. The researcher distributed the questionnaire link to participants via Zalo, a popular social networking application in Vietnam. These Zalo groups, which were created during the researcher’s teaching at the university to support communication beyond classroom hours, served as convenient channels for reaching the target participants. Before completing the survey, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was entirely voluntary. This process ensured compliance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and aimed to create a sense of comfort and willingness among participants, thereby enhancing the reliability of the data collected. Data collection was carried out over a ten-day period during the first semester of the 2024–2025 academic year, from December 9 to 18, 2024.

### 2.5. Data analysis methods

After the data collection was completed, the responses were exported from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel for coding. Each questionnaire item and its corresponding response were coded numerically to facilitate statistical processing. The coded data were then entered into IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 22) for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were employed to summarize participants’ perceptions, self-assessments, and reasons related to nonverbal communication skills in presentations.



### 3. Results

#### 3.1. The perceived importance and use of nonverbal communication skills in presentations

Regarding the perceived importance of nonverbal communication skills in presentations, Figure 1 shows that the majority of participants viewed nonverbal communication as a crucial component of effective presentation delivery. Specifically, 55.6% (n=85) of the participants considered it completely important, whereas 26.1% (n=40) regarded it as quite important, together accounting for 81.7% of the total participants. This clearly reveals that most Vietnamese English major students recognize the importance of using nonverbal strategies—such as vocal modulation, appearance, eye contact, facial expressions, movement, gestures, and posture—to increase the effectiveness of their oral presentations.

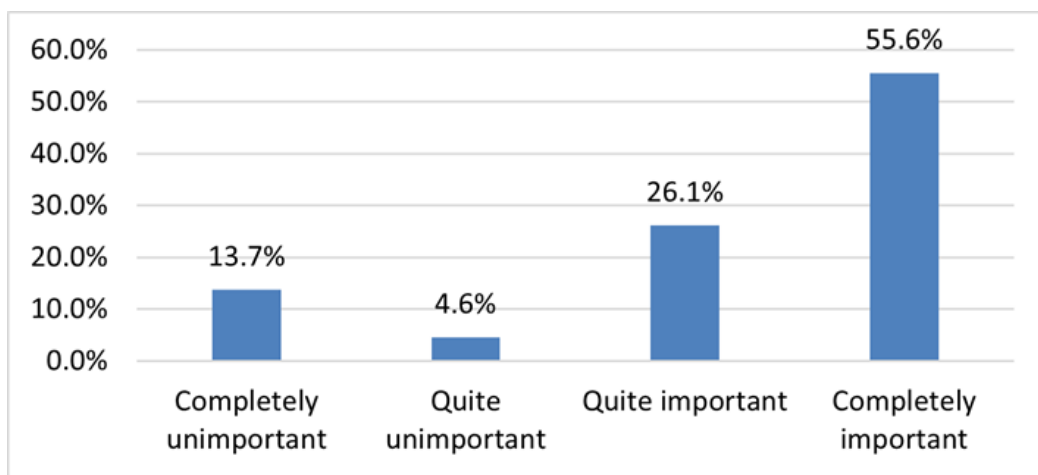


Figure 1 Participants’ perceived importance of nonverbal communication skills in presentations.

As shown in Figure 2, the participants tended to employ the same nonverbal strategies that they regarded as most important in their presentations. However, they prioritized and actively employed vocal delivery and eye contact mainly as nonverbal strategies for audience engagement, whereas other nonverbal strategies receive comparatively less focus. In particular, among the examined nonverbal strategies, vocal modulation and eye contact were identified as the most important and most frequently employed nonverbal strategies by participants. Vocal modulation (pause, stress, and speed of speech) ranked highest in both perceived importance (82.4%) and actual incorporation (83%). This suggests that most participants perceived and employed vocal modulation as a key nonverbal strategy in presentations. Eye contact was similarly identified as important by 69.3% of the participants and incorporated by 79.1%, suggesting that the participants understood its role in audience engagement. Interestingly, hand gestures and postures, although regarded as less important (41.8%), were used more frequently (64.1%). This finding indicates that participants may employ these strategies unconsciously rather than as intentional nonverbal strategies.

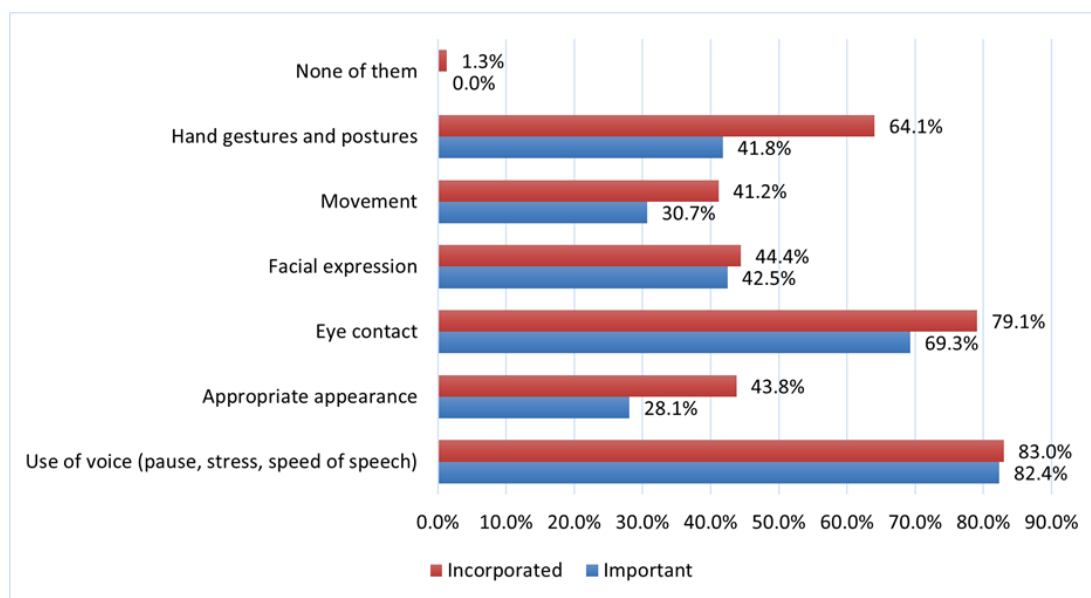


Figure 2 Participants’ perceived importance and use of nonverbal communication strategies in presentations.



As illustrated in Figure 3, over 83% of the participants expressed agreement with all the structured reasons for incorporating nonverbal strategies in their English oral presentations. This suggests that their use of nonverbal strategies is driven by multiple motivational factors. Nevertheless, six factors emerged as the most frequent factors underlying participants' use of nonverbal strategies. By percentage, keeping the audience engaged and attentive (97.4%) was the most frequently endorsed reason, followed closely by clarifying key points and emphasizing key messages to foster audience comprehension and retention (96.7%), fostering a connection with the audience (94.1%), conveying passion and enthusiasm for the topic (92.2%), making presentations memorable and impactful (92.2%), and expressing emotions and attitudes that words alone cannot convey (90.8%). Overall, these findings indicate that Vietnamese English major students primarily use nonverbal strategies to increase their level of engagement, reinforce their meaning and understanding, and establish emotional connections.

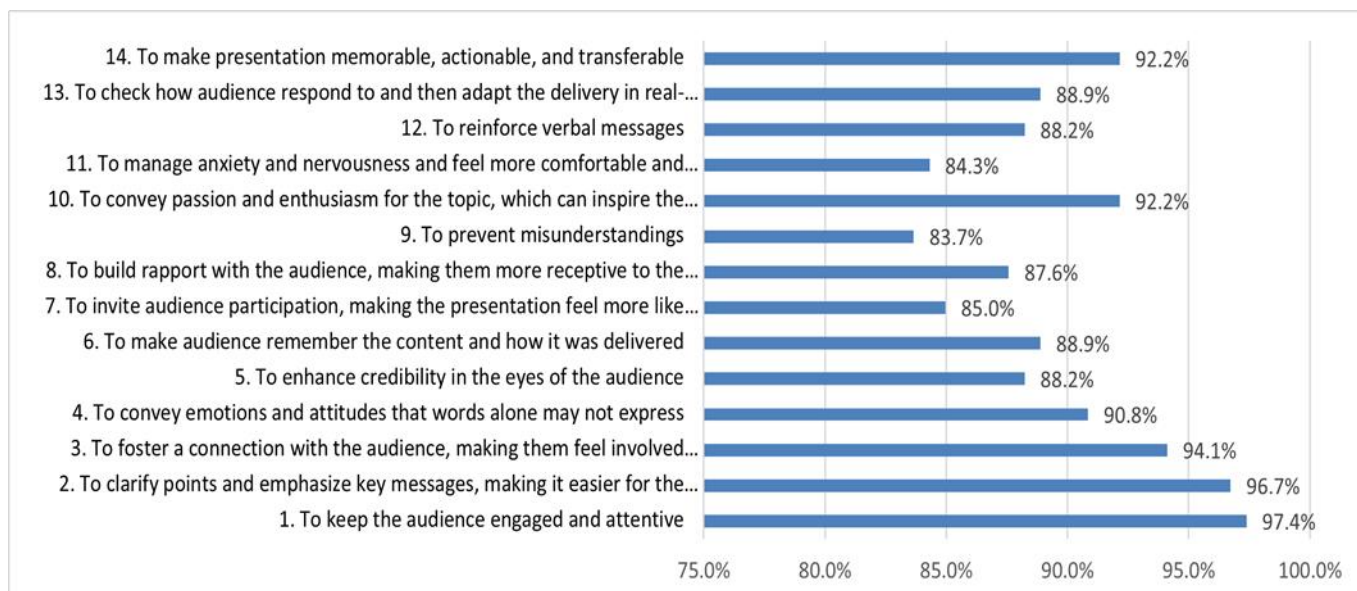


Figure 3 Participants' reasons for incorporating nonverbal strategies in presentations.

In summary, the findings reveal that Vietnamese English major students positively perceive nonverbal communication as a significant component of effective presentation delivery. The majority of participants acknowledged the crucial role of nonverbal strategies—particularly vocal modulation and eye contact—in engaging the audience and reinforcing message clarity. The strong correspondence between perceived importance and actual use further suggests that students consciously integrate these strategies into their presentations. However, certain strategies, such as hand gestures and posture, although frequently used, appear to be employed more intuitively than deliberately, indicating a potential gap in strategic awareness. In addition, students' motivations for employing nonverbal communication are primarily audience-oriented, aiming to sustain attention, clarify meaning, and convey enthusiasm and emotional connection.

### 3.2. Vietnamese EFL students' self-assessment of nonverbal communication skills in presentations

Overall, the data (see Table 2) show that participants rated themselves at a 'fair' level of performance across all the examined nonverbal strategies, with mean scores ranging from 3.17 to 3.44 on a six-point scale (0 = poor to 5 = excellent). This suggests that participants generally use nonverbal strategies comfortably, although minor mistakes or distracting behaviors are still evident.

Among the six examined nonverbal strategies, appearance received the highest mean score (M = 3.44, SD = 1.15). Specifically, the participants rated themselves relatively highly in terms of selecting an appearance that aligns with the presentation topic and suits the audience, thereby establishing credibility and trust (M = 3.36, SD = 1.28), and in terms of choosing an appearance that makes them feel good and confident about themselves (M = 3.52, SD = 1.18). These findings indicate that participants demonstrate a relatively high awareness of how to select an appropriate appearance when delivering presentations. However, as shown in Figure 2, they tend to underestimate the importance of appearance and, consequently, do not employ this strategy consistently. This discrepancy suggests a notable gap between their knowledge and actual practice, reflecting a potential limitation in their mindset toward the role of appearance in effective presentation delivery. Similarly, the relatively high mean score for hand gestures and posture (M = 3.33, SD = 1.21) suggests that participants demonstrate a fair ability to use this nonverbal strategy to project confidence and enhance message clarity. However, as shown in Figure 2, participants tend to underestimate the importance of this strategy and, consequently, do not apply it consistently. This



highlights a pedagogical issue that teachers and lecturers should address in courses where presentations are used as an instructional method.

**Table 2** Participants’ self-assessment of nonverbal strategies in presentations.

Strategies	Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Use of voice	V1. Pause strategically to enhance impact—before or after key points to create suspense, emphasize a message	153	0	5	3.11	1.217
	V2. Stress words which are key words, you want audience to pay attention to, or to change their meaning	153	0	5	3.35	1.194
	V3. Speed up when the information is not important and slow down when it’s important	153	0	5	3.31	1.215
	V4. Repeat intensifiers/key words to highlight the information	153	0	5	3.33	1.164
	V5. Stress words which would normally be unstressed to change the significance of what you say	153	0	5	3.25	1.206
	Average	153	0	5	3.27	1.064
Appearance	A1. Select an appearance that aligns with your topic and is suitable for your audience, helping to establish credibility and build trust	153	0	5	3.36	1.280
	A2. Select an appearance in a way that makes you feel good about or confident of yourself	153	0	5	3.52	1.182
	Average	153	0	5	3.44	1.145
Eye contact	E1. Have a warm smile when making eye contact	153	0	5	3.29	1.336
	E2. Randomly pick one person to have eye contact with	153	0	5	3.19	1.307
	E3. Make eye contact with a person long enough to finish a point; then go to another person	153	0	5	3.04	1.322
	Average	153	0	5	3.17	1.208
Facial expression	F1. Match your facial expressions with your content	153	0	5	3.20	1.262
	F2. Express your emotion (sadness, worry, etc.) or attitude (confidence, optimism, etc.) through your face	153	0	5	3.19	1.266
	F3. Pay attention to your audience’s facial expressions to see how they respond to your presentation	153	0	5	3.35	1.269
	Average	153	0	5	3.24	1.137
Movement	M1. Walk with purpose, stop and share a message	153	0	5	2.99	1.333
Hand gestures and postures	H1. Use hand gestures and posture to convey confidence and clarity	153	0	5	3.33	1.208

*Note:* Scale: 0-poor, 1-weak, 2-limited, 3-fair, 4-good, 5-excellent.

The mean score for the use of voice ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) indicates that the participants considered themselves fairly competent in employing vocal techniques such as stressing key words, adjusting speech speed, and using pauses effectively. The high internal consistency among the five items (V1--V5) further suggests that participants recognize vocal modulation as an essential expressive tool in presentations. Although this strategy was identified as the most important and most frequently used (see Figure 2), participants’ self-assessed performance was only fair. This disparity implies that despite their awareness of its significance, many Vietnamese English major students find vocal modulation challenging to implement effectively, likely due to the difficulties of presenting in a language that is not their mother tongue. Similarly, facial expressions received a comparable mean score ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), indicating that participants felt reasonably confident in aligning their facial expressions with their messages and emotions, as well as in interpreting audience reactions. Nevertheless, as illustrated in Figure 2, they appeared to place less importance on this strategy and therefore did not apply it consistently in their presentations. This pattern points to a pedagogical gap that should be addressed.

Furthermore, eye contact received a comparable mean score ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), suggesting a fair level of self-perceived performance in this strategy. Among the three items (E1-E3), the participants rated themselves highest on maintaining a warm smile while making eye contact ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ), indicating relative ease with expressing friendliness and approachability. Slightly lower mean scores were observed for randomly selected individuals to make eye contact with ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) and for sustaining eye contact long enough to complete a point before shifting to another listener ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ). These results suggest that while students are generally comfortable initiating brief or casual eye contact, they struggle to maintain it purposefully throughout their presentations, even though eye contact was identified as one of the most important and frequently used nonverbal strategies (see Figure 2). This discrepancy indicates that despite recognizing its



significance, many Vietnamese English major students find it challenging to sustain eye contact effectively, likely due to a lack of confidence when presenting in English. Moreover, this may be explained by the participants' limited ability to make purposeful movements during the presentations, as this strategy received the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ).

### 3.3. Vietnamese EFL students' reported reasons for low vs. high self-assessments in nonverbal communication skills

The above analysis indicates that participants' self-assessments of individual nonverbal communication strategies were above a 'fair' level, with mean scores ranging from 3.17--3.44. However, when asked to evaluate their overall nonverbal communication skills, their self-assessed score was notably lower ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 0.809$ ) (see Table 3). This contrast suggests that while students feel fairly confident in specific strategies such as vocal modulation, appearance, and hand gestures, they tend to doubt their overall ability to integrate these nonverbal strategies cohesively during presentations. This finding reflects a lack of confidence in employing nonverbal strategies holistically, which may stem from several factors. To explore this issue more deeply, the following reveals participants' self-reported reasons for their self-assessment. Specifically, participants who rated themselves low (poor, weak, or limited) in nonverbal communication skills were asked to identify the reasons underlying their low self-assessment, whereas those who rated themselves high (fair, good, or excellent) were asked to report the factors that contributed to their success. As shown in Table 3, 43 participants (28.1%) evaluated themselves as having low nonverbal communication competence, while 110 participants (71.9%) rated themselves higher.

**Table 3** Participants' overall self-assessment of their nonverbal communication skills.

	N	Mean	Std. Dev	0	1	2	3	4	5
In general, how do you assess your nonverbal communication skills during presentations?	153	2.87	0.809	1(0.7%)	6(3.9%)	36(23.5%)	80(52.2%)	29(19%)	1(0.7%)

Note: Scale: 0-poor, 1-weak, 2-limited, 3-fair, 4-good, 5-excellent.

As shown in Table 4, the overwhelming number of nonverbal strategies (88.4%) and the fear of public speaking (88.4%) were the two most frequently reported reasons for participants' low self-assessment of nonverbal communication skills. A lack of clear instructional guidance (81.4%) and limited English proficiency (79.1%) were substantially attributed to their low self-assessment. In addition, 76.7% of the participants reported that difficulty in using right nonverbal strategies stemmed from their limited understanding of the presentation topic. Moreover, a limited semantic grasp of nonverbal strategies also contributed to their low self-assessment. Additionally, a lack of interest in mastering nonverbal strategies (69.8%) partly contributed to students' low self-assessment.

**Table 4** Reasons for participants' low self-assessment (poor, weak, or limited) of nonverbal communication skills (N=43).

Reasons	N	%
1. There are so many nonverbal cues that I cannot use or apply them well.	38	88.4%
2. I struggle to recognize the meanings associated with various nonverbal cues.	32	74.4%
3. I lack clear guidelines for incorporating nonverbal elements.	35	81.4%
4. I experience anxiety when speaking in front of a crowd, which makes it difficult for me to use nonverbal communication naturally and effectively.	38	88.4%
5. Not fully understanding the presentation topic makes it hard for me to use the right nonverbal cues.	33	76.7%
6. I struggle to use nonverbal cues because my English skills are not strong enough.	34	79.1%
7. I am not interested in mastering nonverbal language, which makes it difficult for me to use it.	30	69.8%

In contrast, as show in Table 5 participants with high self-assessments ( $n = 110$ ) strongly attributed their perceived success to strong mastery of the presentation topic (90.9%), long-term practice with nonverbal strategies (88.2%) and a keen interest in mastering nonverbal strategies (80%). Moreover, only 62.7% of the respondents linked their effective use of nonverbal strategies to confidence in public speaking and sufficient English proficiency.

**Table 5** Factors contributing to participants' high self-assessment (fair, good, or excellent) in nonverbal communication skills (N=110).

Factors	N	%
1. I have been practicing using nonverbal elements during presentations for a long time.	97	88.2%
2. I am confident when speaking in front of a crowd, which makes it easy for me to use nonverbal communication naturally and effectively.	69	62.7%
3. Fully understanding the presentation topic makes it easy for me to use the right nonverbal cues.	100	90.9%
4. I use nonverbal cues naturally and effectively because my English skills are strong enough.	69	62.7%
5. I am very interested in mastering nonverbal language, which makes it easy for me to use it.	88	80.0%



Overall, these findings provide several key insights into the factors influencing students' use of nonverbal strategies in English presentation. First, the complexity of nonverbal communication itself makes it difficult for students to incorporate multiple nonverbal strategies effectively. However, with regular practice and exposure, students can gradually overcome this barrier and enhance their nonverbal competence. Second, students' understanding of the presentation topic plays a crucial role in facilitating the effective use of nonverbal strategies. Those who have a strong grasp of their topic tend to employ nonverbal strategies more confidently and appropriately, whereas limited topic knowledge hinders their ability to do so. Third, while the fear of public speaking and limited English proficiency negatively affect students' ability to use nonverbal strategies, their influence on their success in incorporating nonverbal strategies is relatively weak. In contrast, students' interest in and motivation to master nonverbal strategies, although not a major factor in their low self-assessment, appear to have a stronger impact on their effective use of nonverbal strategies.

#### 4. Discussion and Implications

In presentations, interaction with the audience often begins before presenters even speak (Osborn et al., 2012). Such interaction typically occurs through the audience's initial impressions of the presenter's appearance, movement, or facial expressions (Osborn et al., 2012). This is consistent with the broader literature on nonverbal immediacy and multimodal engagement (Addimando, 2024). This emphasizes the crucial role of nonverbal communication in public speaking (Nguyen et al., 2015; Scott-Parker, 2017). This raises three important questions: 1) How do Vietnamese English major students perceive the importance and use of nonverbal communication strategies in English oral presentations? 2) How do they self-assess their nonverbal communication skills? 3) What factors contribute to their low or high self-assessment of nonverbal communication skills?

The findings of this study indicate that most Vietnamese English major students recognize the crucial role of nonverbal communication in effective presentations (Nguyen et al., 2015). Among the examined nonverbal strategies, vocal modulation and eye contact were perceived as the most important and most frequently employed strategies for engaging the audience (Scott-Parker, 2017; Eaves & Leathers, 2017; Burgoon et al., 2021) and reinforcing message clarity. The strong alignment between perceived importance and actual use suggests that students consciously integrate these strategies into their presentations. However, certain strategies—such as hand gestures and posture—although commonly used, seem to be employed intuitively rather than strategically, similar to patterns observed among other L2 learners (Apidayani et al., 2024). This reveals a gap in students' metacognitive awareness of nonverbal communication. With respect to their motivations, the students reported using nonverbal communication primarily for audience-oriented purposes: to sustain attention, clarify meaning, and convey enthusiasm and emotional connection. These findings are partly consistent with previous research showing that multimodal competence—the ability to integrate verbal and nonverbal modes—enhances clarity, engagement, and expressiveness in L2 presentations (Morell & Pastor Cesteros, 2018; Palmer-Silveira, 2015).

Although Vietnamese English major students have positive perceptions of using nonverbal strategies in presentations, their actual performance remains at a "fair" level across all the examined strategies—vocal modulation, appearance, eye contact, facial expression, movement, and hand gestures/postures—with mean scores ranging from 3.17 to 3.44 on a six-point scale (0 = poor to 5 = excellent). This finding indicates that while students generally employ nonverbal strategies with a certain degree of comfort, minor errors, inconsistencies, and distracting behaviors are still observable. This fair level may be attributed to psychological, instructional, and linguistic constraints, which collectively hinder students from using nonverbal strategies more effectively.

Specifically, fear of public speaking, a lack of pedagogical guidance, and limited English proficiency appear to constrain their ability to use nonverbal strategies naturally and confidently. These findings are consistent with those of Cingi et al. (2023), Halm (2020), and Burgoon et al. (2020) who emphasized that fear, nervousness, and a lack of structured training often prevent presenters from employing body language effectively during public speaking. However, a major insight from this study is that the complexity of nonverbal cues and fear of public speaking were the most frequently reported barriers. This finding corroborates previous studies showing that EFL learners experience cognitive overload and self-consciousness when they are required to manage multiple nonverbal strategies simultaneously (Hashemi & Hokmabadi, 2011; Rencewigg & Joseph, 2024). Nonetheless, consistent with Ishikawa et al. (2010), the present results suggest that practice and explicit instruction can mitigate these difficulties. Students who reported regular practice with nonverbal strategies achieved greater self-assessments, echoing the findings of Wang et al. (2023), whose gesture-instruction experiment demonstrated the teachability of nonverbal competence.

The study further reveals that topic mastery plays a decisive role in enabling effective nonverbal communication. Students with strong content knowledge employed nonverbal strategies more confidently and naturally. This finding is in line with Harrison (2024), who argued that comprehension of presentation content supports better gesture synchronization. Conversely, students with limited understanding of their presentation topics showed reduced nonverbal expressiveness, indicating that cognitive preparation precedes effective physical expression. Interestingly, English proficiency and fear of public speaking negatively affected students' self-assessed performance but were not strong predictors of success. This partly contrasts with previous research (Cingi et al., 2023; Pérez Cavana, 2023), which revealed that anxiety can severely undermine



nonverbal communication. In this study, motivated students appeared able to compensate for these weaknesses through regular practice and positive attitudes—an observation that supports Anderson (2023), who emphasized motivation and intercultural sensitivity as mediators of nonverbal performance in ESL settings. Finally, interest and motivation emerged as the strongest enablers of effective nonverbal communication, even though they did not strongly contribute to students' low self-assessment of nonverbal communication skills. This finding reinforces Gabryś-Barker (2023) and Levasseur et al. (2021), who stressed that affectivity and engagement are essential to transforming mechanical delivery into expressive, audience-centered communication. Hence, motivational and metacognitive factors deserve more attention in nonverbal communication pedagogy.

Overall, the results highlight the need for more structured and experiential instruction in nonverbal communication within English major curricula in Vietnam. Nonverbal communication training should be embedded within integrated-skill frameworks, where listening, speaking, and visual literacy complement one another (Addimando, 2024). This integrative approach fosters authentic communication and encourages students to connect verbal expression with nonverbal expression—an essential aspect of audience-centered presentations. However, the effectiveness of nonverbal communication instruction largely depends on teachers' pedagogical competence. Teachers should model expressive communication behaviors and adopt experiential methods, such as simulations, role-play, and feedback-based assessments, to cultivate students' nonverbal communication. Additionally, incorporating modules on gestures, facial expressions, and posture—supported by self-reflection, video analysis, and peer feedback—can help students translate awareness into practical skills. As suggested by Domínguez et al. (2024), technology-enhanced feedback systems can further support this development. Teachers should also integrate anxiety-reduction strategies and content-mastery scaffolds to create learning environments in which students can employ nonverbal strategies naturally and confidently.

## 5. Conclusion

This study concludes that while Vietnamese English major students recognize the importance of nonverbal communication in English oral presentations, their actual performance remains fair. Psychological barriers (fear of public speaking), instructional limitations (insufficient training and guidance), and linguistic constraints (limited English proficiency) collectively hinder their ability to use nonverbal strategies effectively. However, students who demonstrate strong topic mastery, regular practice, and genuine motivation achieve more effective nonverbal communication performance. These findings affirm that nonverbal communication skills are both teachable and improvable through deliberate practice and targeted pedagogy. Therefore, English major curricula in Vietnam should integrate structured and experiential modules on gestures, posture, facial expression, and vocal modulation, complemented by feedback-based learning and anxiety management strategies. Doing so will enable students to develop their holistic presentation competence in English.

While the findings offer valuable insights into Vietnamese English majors' nonverbal communication skills, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualize their interpretation. First, the study relies solely on self-reported perceptions and self-assessed performance, which are inherently subject to self-perception bias. Students may overestimate or underestimate their actual abilities due to factors such as confidence levels, social desirability, or limited self-awareness. Future research should incorporate behavioral observations, expert ratings, or video-based assessments to provide a more objective evaluation of students' nonverbal performance. Second, the research design does not include data triangulation. While self-perception provides useful insights into learners' beliefs and experiences, the absence of complementary data sources (e.g., interviews, classroom observations, or peer evaluations) limits the depth of interpretation. Employing mixed methods in future studies would allow for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how students use nonverbal strategies in real presentation contexts. Third, the sample was drawn from a single university, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Although the participants varied in demographic background and academic year, their experiences may not represent English majors in other institutions with different curricula, pedagogical orientations, or levels of exposure to presentation training. Future studies should include multiple institutions or regions to strengthen representativeness and external validity.

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## Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Prior to participation, all individuals were fully informed about the purpose of the study, assured that their involvement was voluntary, and provided informed consent before data collection commenced.

## Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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