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Analyzing Linguistic Complexity in Students' Presentations: A Multimodal Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates linguistic complexity and multimodal strategies in student presentations, aiming to enhance understanding of effective communication in educational settings. The research employs a qualitative approach, analyzing verbal and non-verbal features from video recordings, interviews, and presentation materials of seventh-semester students. Results indicate a wide range of linguistic abilities, with vocabulary diversity and sentence complexity varying significantly among participants. Multimodal strategies, particularly the integration of verbal, visual, and gestural elements, were found to significantly enhance audience engagement. Challenges such as anxiety, language barriers, and technical difficulties were identified, with strategies like peer practice and feedback proving beneficial. The study highlights the importance of targeted support and technical training to improve presentation skills. These findings contribute to the existing knowledge by emphasizing the value of multimodal communication and suggesting practical approaches for educators. Future research could explore skill development over time and the impact of multimodal strategies in diverse educational contexts.

Introduction

In the increasingly globalized world, effective communication skills are paramount. Linguistic competence, particularly in English, is a critical asset for students, as it enhances their ability to engage in academic, professional, and social contexts (Passa & Kougiourouki, 2024; Paudel, 2024). The ability to present ideas clearly and effectively in English is a vital skill for students, especially in non-native English-speaking countries. Presentations, as a pedagogical tool, offer a platform for students to demonstrate their linguistic capabilities, engage with their audience, and convey complex ideas succinctly (Martin, 2023; Mehdi, 2023; Vanisree et al., 2024). However, the complexity of linguistic features in student presentations often poses challenges for both learners and educators. Understanding the factors that contribute to linguistic complexity in presentations can inform teaching practices and improve learning outcomes (Atox & Clark, 2024; Paudel, 2024).

Recent studies have highlighted the significance of multimodal approaches in analyzing linguistic complexity (Lim et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2022). Multimodal analysis considers various modes of communication, such as speech, gesture, and visual aids, which are integral to effective presentations (Noël et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2022). This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how students construct meaning and engage with their audience. For instance, Weninger (2020) emphasizes that multimodal analysis can reveal the interplay between verbal and non-verbal elements in communication, offering insights into students' linguistic proficiency. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2021); Rasenberg et al. (2020) argues that a multimodal perspective is essential for capturing the dynamic and interactive nature of presentations, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of linguistic complexity.

Despite the growing interest in multimodal analysis, there is still a paucity of research focusing specifically on linguistic complexity in student presentations. Much of the existing literature has concentrated on written texts, leaving a gap in understanding how linguistic complexity manifests in spoken discourse (Goulart et al., 2020; Goźdź-Roszkowski, 2021). Additionally, studies have often overlooked the unique challenges faced by students in non-native English-speaking contexts, where linguistic and cultural factors intersect to influence communication (Nigar, 2024; Selvi et al., 2024). This study aims to address these gaps by examining linguistic complexity in student presentations through a multimodal lens, with a particular focus on English language learners.

The primary research problem addressed in this study is the complexity of linguistic features in student presentations. This complexity can hinder students' ability to effectively communicate their ideas and engage with their audience. Understanding the factors that contribute to this complexity is essential for developing strategies to enhance students' presentation skills. By investigating the linguistic features that characterize student presentations, this study seeks to provide insights into how students construct meaning and convey information in a coherent and engaging manner.

A specific issue has been identified in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang, particularly among seventh-semester students. These students often struggle with presenting complex ideas in English, resulting in presentations that lack coherence and clarity. This challenge is compounded by limited exposure to authentic English-speaking contexts and insufficient practice in using English for academic purposes. As a result, students may rely heavily on memorized scripts or simplistic language structures, which can impede their ability to engage effectively with their audience.

To address the general problem of linguistic complexity in student presentations, several strategies can be employed. Educators can incorporate multimodal teaching methods that emphasize the integration of verbal and non-verbal communication (Chalal & Ummto, 2024; Guo, 2023). By encouraging students to use visual aids, gestures, and other modes of communication, teachers can help students develop a more holistic approach to presentations. Additionally, providing students with opportunities to practice their presentation skills in authentic contexts can enhance their linguistic competence and confidence (Lindenberg, 2023; Sirisrimangkorn, 2021).

Specific solutions to the research problem have been proposed in the literature. For example, Chuang (2008); Myint (2019) suggest that task-based language teaching (TBLT) can be an effective approach to improving students' presentation skills. TBLT focuses on meaningful communication and real-world

tasks, allowing students to practice using language in context. This approach can help students develop the ability to organize their ideas, use appropriate language structures, and engage with their audience effectively. Furthermore, incorporating peer feedback and reflective practices can encourage students to critically evaluate their presentations and identify improvement areas (Ismail, 2019; Jabri & Ismail, 2021; Karnieli-miller, 2020; N. Z. Day et al., 2022).

An overview of the literature related to the solutions provided in this study reveals a research gap in applying multimodal approaches to analyzing linguistic complexity in student presentations. While there is substantial research on multimodal communication and language teaching methodologies, few studies have specifically addressed the intersection of these areas in the context of student presentations (Anis & Khan, 2023; Lim et al., 2022). This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how multimodal analysis can inform our understanding of linguistic complexity in student presentations and contribute to the development of effective teaching strategies.

The objectives of this study are to analyze the linguistic complexity of student presentations using a multimodal approach and to identify effective strategies for enhancing students' presentation skills. This research is novel in its focus on the intersection of multimodal analysis and linguistic complexity in the context of English language learners. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: What are the key linguistic features contributing to student presentation complexity? How can multimodal analysis inform teaching practices to improve students' presentation skills? The scope of this study is limited to seventh-semester students in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang, providing insights that may be applicable to similar educational contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring the intricacies of linguistic complexity and multimodal communication in student presentations. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the various elements contributing to linguistic complexity, providing rich, descriptive data that can inform teaching practices (Richards, 2009). This design is particularly suitable for capturing the dynamic and interactive nature of presentations, as it facilitates the exploration of verbal and non-verbal communication modes.

Participants

The participants in this study were seventh-semester students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who were representative of the population and who could provide relevant insights into the research problem (Campbell et al., 2020). A total of 30 students participated in the study, ensuring a diverse range of linguistic abilities and presentation experiences. The selection criteria included students' willingness to participate and enrolment in courses requiring oral presentations.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection involved multiple methods to capture the complexity of student presentations comprehensively. These methods included video recordings of student presentations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of presentation materials.

Video Recordings

Video recordings of student presentations served as the primary data source, enabling a detailed analysis of both verbal and non-verbal communication modes. Recordings were made during classroom presentations, with students'

consent, to ensure authenticity and minimize disruption to the natural presentation environment. The recordings provided a rich dataset for examining linguistic features, such as vocabulary use, sentence structure, and coherence, as well as non-verbal elements like gestures, facial expressions, and the use of visual aids (Anis & Khan, 2023; Lim et al., 2022).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to gain insights into their perceptions and experiences of preparing and delivering presentations. The interviews allowed for the exploration of students' reflections on their presentation skills, challenges faced, and strategies used to overcome these challenges (Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2013; Wu et al., 2015). The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews facilitated the collection of in-depth qualitative data, complementing the findings from the video recordings.

Presentation Materials

Presentation materials, such as slides and handouts, were also collected and analyzed. These materials provided additional context for understanding the content and structure of student presentations. The analysis of presentation materials focused on the organization of information, the use of language, and the integration of visual elements, which are critical components of multimodal communication (Martin, 2023).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using a multimodal discourse analysis framework, which allows for the examination of multiple modes of communication and their interrelationships (Noël et al., 2022). This framework was chosen for its ability to capture the complexity of linguistic and non-linguistic elements in student presentations.

Transcription and Coding

The video recordings were transcribed verbatim, and a coding scheme was developed to categorize linguistic features and multimodal elements. The coding process involved identifying patterns and themes related to linguistic complexity, such as the use of technical vocabulary, syntactic structures, and coherence markers (Damiani, 2009; Royce, 2020). Non-verbal elements, such as gestures and visual aids, were also coded to analyze their role in enhancing or hindering communication.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret patterns within the data. This approach facilitated the exploration of key themes related to the research questions, such as factors contributing to linguistic complexity and the effectiveness of multimodal strategies in presentations (Morell, 2015). The thematic analysis provided a systematic method for synthesizing findings from the various data sources, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Multimodal Analysis

Multimodal analysis was conducted to examine the interplay between verbal and non-verbal elements in student presentations. This analysis focused on how different modes of communication were used to construct meaning and engage the audience (Karnieli-miller, 2020; Mulyanah et al., 2018). By analyzing the integration of speech, gestures, and visual aids, the study aimed to uncover the multimodal strategies that contribute to effective presentations.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was used to corroborate findings from different data sources, enhancing the credibility of the results. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. Additionally, a detailed audit trail was maintained to document the research process and decisions made during data analysis, ensuring transparency and replicability.

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RESULT

Verbal Features in Student Presentations

The analysis of verbal features focused on vocabulary use, sentence structures, and coherence in student presentations. The findings indicate a wide range of linguistic abilities among participants, reflecting the diversity of their language proficiency levels.

Vocabulary Use

The use of vocabulary varied significantly across participants. Some students demonstrated a rich and varied vocabulary, incorporating technical terms and advanced language structures, while others relied on basic vocabulary with frequent repetition. This variation aligns with previous studies suggesting that vocabulary diversity is a key indicator of linguistic proficiency in spoken discourse (Damiani, 2009; Royce, 2020).

Table 1: Vocabulary Use Across Participants

Vocabulary Level	Number of Participants
Advanced	10
Intermediate	12
Basic	8

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of vocabulary levels among participants. The majority of students fell into the intermediate category, indicating a moderate level of lexical diversity.

Sentence Structures

The complexity of sentence structures also varied, with some students using complex sentences effectively to convey detailed information, while others relied on simple sentences. The ability to use complex sentences is associated with higher linguistic competence, as it allows for the expression of nuanced ideas and relationships between concepts (Goulart et al., 2020; Goźdź-Roszkowski, 2021; Paudel, 2024).

Coherence and Organization

Coherence and logical organization were assessed through the analysis of presentation transcripts. Students who demonstrated clear and logical organization in their presentations were more successful in maintaining audience engagement. This finding supports the notion that coherence is a crucial aspect of effective communication (N. Z. Day et al., 2022).

Non-Verbal Features and Multimodal Strategies

Non-verbal features, including gestures, facial expressions, and the use of visual aids, were analyzed to understand their contribution to the effectiveness of student presentations.

Gestures and Facial Expressions

Gestures and facial expressions played a significant role in enhancing communication. Participants who used gestures effectively were able to emphasize key points and maintain audience interest. This finding is consistent with the literature on multimodal communication, which highlights the importance of non-verbal elements in reinforcing verbal messages (Anis & Khan, 2023).
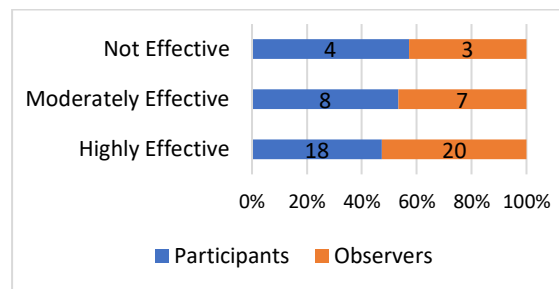
Use of Visual Aids

Visual aids, such as slides and handouts, played a crucial role in enhancing the quality of many student presentations. Students who effectively integrated visual elements were able to clarify complex information and maintain audience engagement. This finding underscores the importance of visual aids in supporting verbal communication, as they can help illustrate points that may be difficult to convey through speech alone.

However, not all students were equally successful in utilizing visual aids. Some participants encountered challenges with the technical aspects of creating and using visuals, which occasionally detracted from the overall effectiveness of their presentations. These technical difficulties highlight the necessity for students to develop proficiency in using visual tools, as emphasized in the research by Procel et al. (2024; Webber et al. (2012), which discusses

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the critical role of technical skills in effective multimodal communication.

The effectiveness of visual aids was assessed by both participants and observers, with ratings falling into three categories: "Highly Effective," "Moderately Effective," and "Not Effective." The dataset below summarizes these ratings:

Figure 1. Effectiveness of Visual Aids in Student Presentations

Figure 1 illustrates the perceived effectiveness of visual aids, as rated by participants and observers. The data shows that the majority of students and observers found visual aids to be highly effective in conveying information. However, a portion of the students experienced technical difficulties, which affected their ability to use visual aids effectively. This figure underscores the importance of technical proficiency in maximizing the benefits of visual aids in presentations.

By examining the data and insights from this section, it becomes clear that while visual aids are a powerful tool for enhancing presentations, their effectiveness is contingent upon the user's ability to integrate them seamlessly into their communication strategy. This finding suggests a need for targeted training in the technical aspects of visual aid creation and usage to ensure that all students can fully leverage these tools to enhance their presentations.

Challenges Faced by Students

The semi-structured interviews revealed several challenges faced by students in preparing and delivering their presentations. Common challenges included managing anxiety, language barriers, and technical difficulties.

Managing Anxiety

Anxiety was a prevalent issue, affecting students' ability to deliver their presentations confidently. Many participants reported feeling nervous, which impacted their performance. This finding is consistent with existing literature on public speaking anxiety, which highlights its negative effects on communication (Karnieli-miller, 2020; Noël et al., 2022).

Language Barriers

Language barriers were a significant challenge for students, particularly those with lower proficiency levels. Participants expressed difficulty in finding the right words to convey their ideas, leading to hesitations and reliance on memorized scripts. This challenge underscores the need for targeted language support for non-native speakers (Nigar, 2024; Selvi et al., 2024).

Technical Difficulties

Technical difficulties, such as issues with visual aids or equipment, were reported by several students. These challenges often disrupted the flow of presentations, highlighting the importance of technical preparedness in multimodal communication (Anis & Khan, 2023; Guo, 2023).

Student Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

Despite the challenges, students employed various strategies to enhance their presentation skills. These strategies included practicing with peers, seeking feedback, and focusing on content organization.

Practicing with Peers

Many students found practicing with peers to be beneficial, as it provided opportunities for feedback and increased their confidence. Peer practice allowed students to refine their delivery and improve their use of language (Karnieli-miller, 2020; Noël et al., 2022).

Seeking Feedback

Seeking feedback from instructors and peers was another common strategy. Feedback helped students identify areas for improvement and adjust their presentations accordingly. This approach aligns with the literature on formative assessment, which emphasizes the value of feedback in enhancing learning outcomes (N. Z. Day et al., 2022).

Focusing on Content Organization

Students who focused on organizing their content effectively were more successful in delivering coherent presentations. This strategy involved creating detailed outlines and rehearsing the logical flow of information, which contributed to improved coherence and audience engagement (Ginotite, 2024; Hontarenko & Kovalenko, 2024).

Overall Effectiveness of Multimodal Approaches

The study found that multimodal approaches significantly enhanced the effectiveness of student presentations. By integrating verbal and non-verbal elements, students were able to convey complex information more clearly and engage their audience more effectively.

Integration of Verbal and Non-Verbal Elements

The integration of verbal and non-verbal elements was a key factor in successful presentations. Students who effectively combined these modes were able to create a more dynamic and engaging presentation, supporting the findings of Norris (2004) on the importance of multimodal communication.

Impact on Audience Engagement

The use of multimodal strategies in student presentations significantly enhanced audience engagement. Presentations that effectively integrated various modes of communication—such as speech, gestures, and visual aids—were notably more successful in capturing and maintaining the audience's interest. This finding underscores the importance of

multimodal approaches in educational settings, as they provide a richer and more dynamic experience for both presenters and audiences. The impact of multimodal strategies on audience engagement was assessed by categorizing presentations based on the modes used and evaluating the level of audience engagement they achieved. The following figure summarizes these findings:
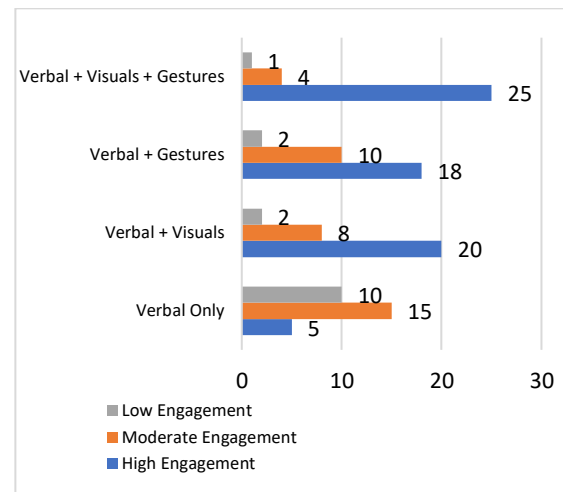
Figure 2. Impact of Multimodal Strategies on Audience Engagement

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the data, illustrating the effectiveness of different multimodal strategies in enhancing audience engagement. The figure clearly demonstrates that presentations incorporating a combination of verbal, visual, and gestural elements achieved the highest levels of audience engagement. Presentations that relied solely on verbal communication were less effective in maintaining audience interest.

This analysis highlights the value of multimodal approaches in educational settings, as supported by (Anis & Khan, 2023; Lim et al., 2022), who emphasizes the role of multimodal communication in creating more engaging and effective learning experiences. By leveraging the strengths of various communication modes, presenters can enhance their ability to connect with audiences and convey complex information more effectively.

Discussion

Linguistic Complexity in Student Presentations

The analysis of verbal features, including vocabulary use, sentence structures, and coherence, revealed a wide spectrum of linguistic abilities among the participants. The diversity in vocabulary levels, as shown in Table 1, highlights the varying degrees of lexical proficiency among students, with the majority exhibiting intermediate vocabulary skills. This finding is consistent with Damiani (2009); Royce (2020), who emphasize that vocabulary diversity is a key indicator of linguistic proficiency in spoken discourse. The variation in vocabulary use suggests that while some students are adept at employing technical terms and advanced language structures, others require further development in this area.

The use of complex sentence structures was another indicator of linguistic competence. Students who effectively utilized complex sentences were able to convey nuanced ideas and intricate relationships, aligning with Goźdź-Roszkowski (2021); Paudel (2024) assertion that complex sentence usage reflects higher linguistic competence. However, the reliance on simple sentences by some participants indicates a need for targeted instruction to enhance syntactic complexity in student presentations.

Coherence and organization were critical in maintaining audience engagement. Presentations that were logically structured and coherent were more successful in capturing the audience's attention, supporting N. Z. Day et al. (2022) findings on the importance of coherence in effective communication. These results underscore the need for educators to focus on teaching strategies that enhance coherence and logical flow in student presentations.

The Role of Non-Verbal Features and Multimodal Strategies

Non-verbal features, such as gestures and facial expressions, significantly contributed to the effectiveness of student presentations. Participants who used gestures effectively were able to emphasize key points and engage their audience, consistent with Lim et al. (2022) findings on the importance of non-verbal elements in reinforcing verbal messages. This highlights the value of incorporating non-verbal communication training into presentation skills development.

Visual aids also played a crucial role in enhancing presentation quality. As illustrated in Figure 1, the majority of students and observers rated visual aids as highly effective in conveying information. However, technical difficulties encountered by some students emphasize the need for technical proficiency in using visual tools, as discussed by (Martin, 2023). This suggests that educators should provide training in the technical aspects of visual aid creation and usage to ensure all students can fully leverage these tools.

Challenges and Strategies for Overcoming

The study identified several challenges faced by students, including managing anxiety, language barriers, and technical difficulties. Anxiety was a prevalent issue, affecting students' confidence and performance, which aligns with research on public speaking anxiety (Mustakim & Ismail, 2019; Samad & Ismail, 2020). To mitigate this, educators should consider incorporating anxiety-reduction techniques, such as relaxation exercises and practice opportunities, into their teaching strategies.

Language barriers were particularly challenging for students with lower proficiency levels, leading to hesitations and reliance on memorized scripts. This finding highlights the need for targeted language support, as emphasized by (Nigar, 2024; Selvi et al., 2024), to help non-native speakers improve their fluency and confidence in delivering presentations.

Technical difficulties with visual aids disrupted the flow of some presentations, underscoring the importance of technical preparedness in multimodal communication (Noël et al., 2022). Educators should ensure that students are equipped with the necessary technical skills to effectively use visual aids and troubleshoot common issues.

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Despite these challenges, students employed various strategies to enhance their presentation skills. Practicing with peers was found to be beneficial, providing opportunities for feedback and increasing confidence. This aligns with Guo (2023); Weninger (2020) findings on the value of peer practice in refining delivery and language use. Seeking feedback from instructors and peers also helped students identify areas for improvement, supporting N. Z. Day et al. (2022) emphasis on formative assessment.

Focusing on content organization was another effective strategy, as students who created detailed outlines and rehearsed their presentations were more successful in delivering coherent messages. This approach is consistent with Ducasse & Brown (2023); Hanifa et al. (2024) findings on the importance of organization in enhancing coherence and audience engagement.

The Impact of Multimodal Approaches

The study found that multimodal approaches significantly enhanced the effectiveness of student presentations. By integrating verbal and non-verbal elements, students were able to convey complex information more clearly and engage their audience more effectively. As illustrated in Figure 2, presentations incorporating a combination of verbal, visual, and gestural elements achieved the highest levels of audience engagement. This finding supports Guo (2023) research on the importance of multimodal communication in creating dynamic and engaging presentations.

The positive impact of multimodal strategies on audience engagement underscores the value of these approaches in educational settings. Anis & Khan (2023) emphasizes the role of multimodal communication in creating more engaging and effective learning experiences, suggesting that educators should encourage students to leverage the strengths of various communication modes. By providing students with the skills and tools needed to integrate verbal, visual, and gestural elements, educators can help students create more impactful presentations and improve learning outcomes.

Implications and Limitations

The findings of this study have several implications for educational practice. First, the diversity in linguistic abilities among students highlights the need for differentiated instruction that addresses varying proficiency levels. Educators should provide targeted support to help students develop their vocabulary, sentence structures, and coherence in presentations.

The importance of non-verbal communication and visual aids suggests that educators should incorporate training in these areas into their curriculum. By equipping students with the skills needed to effectively use gestures, facial expressions, and visual aids, educators can enhance students' presentation skills and overall communication competence.

However, this study has limitations that should be considered. The sample size was limited to students from a single institution, which may not fully represent the diversity of English language learners in different contexts. Future research could address this limitation by including a larger and more diverse sample and exploring linguistic complexity in presentations across various educational settings.

Additionally, the focus on seventh-semester students may not capture the experiences of learners at different stages of their academic journey. Future studies could examine how presentation skills develop over time and identify key factors that contribute to this development.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of linguistic complexity and the use of multimodal strategies in student presentations. By examining verbal and non-verbal features, the research highlights the diverse linguistic abilities among students and the significant impact of multimodal approaches on audience engagement. The findings reveal that students who effectively integrate verbal, visual, and gestural elements into their presentations are more successful in conveying complex information and maintaining audience interest.

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The study identifies key challenges faced by students, such as anxiety, language barriers, and technical difficulties, and outlines strategies employed to overcome these challenges. These insights underscore the importance of providing targeted support and training to enhance students' presentation skills. The research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by emphasizing the value of multimodal communication in educational settings and suggesting practical approaches for improving student presentations.

The implications of this study are significant for educators, as they highlight the need for differentiated instruction and technical training to support diverse learners. By equipping students with the necessary skills to effectively use multimodal strategies, educators can foster more engaging and effective communication. Future research could explore the development of presentation skills over time and examine the impact of multimodal approaches in different educational contexts.

In summary, this study underscores the importance of integrating verbal and non-verbal elements in student presentations to enhance communication and engagement. By addressing the challenges identified and leveraging the strengths of multimodal strategies, educators can better support students in developing effective presentation skills, ultimately contributing to improved learning outcomes.

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137

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