

# The Influence of Kinesics and Vocalic in ESL Oral Presentation among Undergraduates

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## ABSTRACT

Oral presentations have become part of many course assessments. During presentations, presenters use verbal and non-verbal cues. Learners Nonverbal cues are used either directly or indirectly by presenters to express their feelings towards the oral presentation. Some common nonverbal cues often used are kinesics and vocalic. Kinesics is derived from the word 'kinesics' which means 'movement' and refer to the hands, legs, body and facial movements. Vocalic is the study of voice and it is used to address a message for example like the tone of voice This study is done to explore the influence of kinesics and vocalic in ESL orang presentation among ESL learners. 30 undergraduates responded to a questionnaire about how they perceive the use of kinesics and vocalics in oral presentations. Findings revealed ESL learners used a variety of nonverbal cues in their presentation for different reasons in their presentations. The results of this study bear interesting pedagogical implications for classroom teaching and learning of ESL oral presentations.

**Keywords:** *ESL learners, Non verbal cues, Kinesics, Vocalics.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### *1.1. Background of Study*

Nonverbal cues can be divided into 5 different types which are kinesics, haptics, vocalics, proxemics, and chronemics. However, the main types often used are kinesics and vocalic because they are mainly used in oral presentation. Kinesics is derived from the word 'kinesis' which means 'movement'. Kinesics refers to the hands, legs, body and facial movements. According to [Burgoon et al. \(2016\)](#) kinesics focuses on the use of gestures, head movements and posture, eye contact, and facial expressions as nonverbal communication. Haptics is a way to communicate through touch. The use of kinesis reflects on how touch has the power to comfort someone in the moment of sorrow when words alone cannot be used ([Burgoon et al., 2016](#)). Proxemics is a study of distance and space that manipulates the communication. When a person is attracted to someone, the person will say they are "close" to him or her. This is an example given by [Burgoon et al. \(2016\)](#).

Nonverbal cues are important in many contexts. In a professional context, nonverbal cues can be used to help set a good impression to fellow colleagues, higher up or to a client. According to [DeGroot and Gooty \(2009\)](#) nonverbal cues can be a major aid in job interview because with good mastery of nonverbal cues can help set good first impression to the employer. In a social context, it can be a method to communicate with different cultures, a way to conquer the language barrier that may occurs between different cultures. In an academic context, it helps to improve the way students communicate among themselves and also improve the students' oral presentation. Nonverbal cues will greatly improve the learning progress of the students.

Oral presentation is a method to deliver messages to persuade or inform the audiences of the subject matter that is being presented. This method is mostly used in higher learning to show the understanding of the students on the subject matter based on the knowledge that they have acquired. In a professional context, as stated by [De Grez et al. \(2012\)](#) oral presentation is mostly used to persuade the client. A good oral presentation requires the mastery of nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues are important in oral presentations because nonverbal cues aid the presenter to be more engaged with the audience. Nonverbal cues have many variety of usage. According to [Newman et al. \(2016\)](#) with a slight change of nonverbal cues can immediately change the atmosphere of the presentation.

### *1.2. Problem Statement*

Nonverbal cues are considered as a universal language but it still has some flaws in certain aspects of communication. The reason could be the lack of knowledge in nonverbal communication. People take nonverbal communication for granted and this has caused many miscommunications when they communicate with other people. For example in Malaysia, when a person put their five fingers together to shape a clove and shake it, it means "do you want anything to eat?" While in Italy, it may differently. According to [Rosip and Hall \(2004\)](#) nonverbal cues may be a universal language but there are still some cultural barriers that are needed to be recognised to avoid any misunderstanding between two cultures. So it is really important to understand the importance of nonverbal cues in order to avoid this type of miscommunication.

Many university students do not know how to use these nonverbal cues correctly and that affected their presentation in a negative way. For example, a student may doing a presentation with a slouched body posture, low voice tone, or even stayed at one position throughout the presentation. These criteria will lead to a very bad presentation because the audience will not have the motivation to be engaged. The usage of nonverbal cues in oral presentation is very important because it emphasizes on the confidence of the individual. The objective of the study

is to identify the influences of kinesics and vocalic in oral presentation. The study is done to answer the following questions;

- a. In what ways does kinesics influence oral presentation?
- b. In what ways do vocalic influence oral presentation?
- c. How does the use of kinesics differ across gender?
- d. How does the use of vocalic differ across gender?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *2.1. Oral Presentation*

During oral presentation, presenters use verbal and non-verbal cues. Presenters might not realize that nonverbal cues play a major part in having a successful oral presentation. There are many types of nonverbal cues like tone of voice, facial expressions, body language and posture, haptic, proxemics, gesture, eye gaze, appearance, artefacts and etc. These types of nonverbal communication are considered as the important in oral presentation and it is important to know how to apply these nonverbal cues when doing a presentation.

Oral presentation is an art that involves attention to the needs of the audience, careful planning, and attention to delivery as stated by [Grez et al. \(2012\)](#). Oral presentation is a method to deliver a message to persuade or inform the audiences of the subject matter that is being presented. In a professional context, oral presentation is mostly used to persuade the client. A good oral presentation requires the mastery of nonverbal cues. varieties of usage. According to [Newman et al. \(2016\)](#) a slight change of nonverbal cues, can immediately change the atmosphere of the presentation as well as audience engagement towards the presentation.

### *2.2. Nonverbal Communication*

[Burgoon et al. \(2016\)](#) reported that nonverbal communication helps an individual to send a message across without even using any verbal communication and it is much more effective in conveying emotion and feelings. So it is important to know how to use nonverbal communication so that people can easily deliver messages across when doing presentations. It is also a way to set a good impression to the audience when doing a presentation. A good oral presentation is when the presenter is able to make a good impression towards the audience to gain their interest in listening to the presentation. [Rosip and Hall \(2004\)](#) also mentioned that in order to make a good impression, a lot of criteria must be adhered to. Among some of the criteria are appearance, body posture and many more.

According to [Burgoon et al. \(2016\)](#) some common visual cues are body language (kinesics), distance (proxemics) and physical environments/appearance, of voice (vocalics) and of touch (haptics) as well as chronemics (the use of time). Speech contains nonverbal elements known as paralanguage, including voice quality, rate, pitch, volume, and speaking style, as well as prosodic features such as rhythm, intonation, and stress. On the other hand, written texts can have nonverbal elements such as handwriting style, spatial arrangement of words, or the physical layout of a page.

However, as stated by [Rosip and Hall \(2004\)](#) much of the study of nonverbal communication focused on interaction between individuals, where it can be classified into three principal areas: environmental conditions where communication takes place, physical characteristics of the communicators, and behaviors of communicators during interaction. All of these factors are important for a good oral presentation because each factor plays its own role in making the oral presentation. It is an aid for the student to grab the attention of the audience without even saying a single word.

Nonverbal communication involves conscious and unconscious processes of encoding and decoding. [Givens \(2002\)](#) reported that encoding is the act of generating information such as facial expressions, gestures, and postures. Encoding information utilizes signals which are universal. Decoding is the interpretation of information from received sensations given by the encoder. Decoding information utilizes knowledge one may have of certain received sensations. As stated by [Newman et al. \(2016\)](#) people become verbal communicators, they begin to look at facial expressions, vocal tones, and other nonverbal elements more subconsciously. After mastering these nonverbal cues, people will be able to decode nonverbal cues with ease and are able to identify what are the audience feeling during the oral presentation and encode a suitable respond to the audience to maintain that attention and keep the audience engaged to the oral presentation.

In addition to that, culture plays an important role in nonverbal communication, and it is one aspect that helps to influence how learning activities are organized ([Edinger and Patterson, 1983](#)). In many Indigenous American Communities, for example, there is often an emphasis on nonverbal communication, which acts as a valued means by which children learn. In this sense, learning is not dependent on verbal communication; rather, it is nonverbal communication which serves as a primary means of not only organizing interpersonal interactions, but also conveying cultural values, and children learn how to participate in this system from a young age as stated by [Grez et al. \(2012\)](#). All of these factors are important and must be taken into account when doing oral presentations.

### *2.3. Nonverbal Cues*

Nonverbal cues are perceptual information communicated in a social exchange by signs accompanying the words used in speech. As stated by [D'Mello and Graesser \(2010\)](#) such cues include body language, tone, inflexion, and other elements of voice, dress, and many more. Nonverbal cues are communication signals without the use of vocabulary. According to [Givens \(2002\)](#) facial expression of sadness would be an example of a nonverbal cue. How do you know when someone is happy with you even though they do not say they are happy? You may see nonverbal cues such as a smile, open arms, widened eyes, and many more. Nonverbal cues are a way to express feelings without the usage any verbal communication. Nonverbal cues consist of kinesics, haptics, vocalics, proxemics, and chronemics.

#### *2.3.1. Kinesics*

Kinesics comes from the 'kinesics' meaning movements. Kinesics is a study of physical movements. This also includes body language, facial expression, eye contact, gestures, postures, and appearances. [Burgoon et al. \(2016\)](#) reported that kinesics can greatly influence they people communicate because with the proper understanding and knowledge of kinesics, it can further reinforce the message that the speaker is trying to convey in order to persuade the listener and understand what is being conveyed.

##### *(a) Body Language*

According to [Givens \(2002\)](#) body language is a way to convey a message with the usage of body movements. During an oral presentation, body language is important because it keeps speaker active during the oral presentation and when the audience see the presenters active, they also be active in listening and engaging themselves to oral presentation. For example, presenters are doing oral presentation and hands never stopped moving. The audience will be intrigued at the active motion of the speaker' hands and will be engaged subconsciously to the oral presentation. Body language also shows the confidence level of the presenters doing the

presentation. If the presenters just remained stagnant during the presentation, it shows that the presenters are not confident in their presentation and this can also lead to a very dull presentation.

*(b) Facial Expression*

**Facial expression** can be defined as a way to express feeling through facial expression like pouting to show sadness. Facial expression is important in oral presentation because it aids the presenters to express their feeling towards the audience. The presenters can highlight the important points of the presentation by making facial expression to show concern on the matter.

*(c) Eye Contact*

**Eye contact** can be used to convey a message like winking to show interest of the person. Eye contact is important in oral presentation because with strong eye contact with the audience, the audience to be can be engaged to the presentation.

*(d) Gestures*

**Gestures** is sending signal through the usage of body movements like a thumb up to show good. Gestures can help a lot when doing oral presentation to communicate with the audience nonverbally. Gestures can also be used to encourage the audience to interact with the presenter. When one of the audience members answered a question correctly, the presenter can give a smile and a thumb up to compliment on the effort that was given.

*(e) Appearance*

**Appearance** can be defined as something that can characterise an individual just by observing his or her appearance. This is important in oral presentation because a good impression can be made by wearing the right attire. According to [Grez et al. \(2012\)](#) appearance plays a major role in setting a good impression during a job interview. That also applies in doing an oral presentation. Good impression can help gain the confidence of the audience, when this has been accomplished, the audience will be more engaged and become more interactive during the oral presentation.

*(f) Artifacts*

**Artifacts** are the usage of items or object to deliver a message like gift giving to show kindness or love. Artifacts can also be used as a demonstration prop to help the audience understand better about the oral presentation. Like demonstrating how to make a DIY photo frame or sun dial. Artifacts is also important in oral presentation because it can be used to uncover new knowledge.

All these are important when doing a presentation. It plays a major role in making a good impression towards the audience. As stated by [DeGroot and Gooty \(2009\)](#) nonverbal cues really help make an impression when it is used properly. All of these nonverbal cues must be used by the presenter in order to gain the attention of the audience.

*2.3.2. Haptics*

**Haptic** is a form of communication through touch like consoling a friend by touching his or her shoulder. The power of touch can greatly influence and console a person in sorrow ([Edinger and Patterson, 1983](#)). Touching can also help to identify the relationship.

### *2.3.3. Vocalic*

**Vocalic** is the study of voice and how it is used to address a message for example like the tone of voice. This study is very important in oral presentation because tone of voice play a major role in keeping the attention of the audience. The presenters will need a high tone of voice to have good oral presentation because the audience will hear the presenter loud and clear and are able to catch every point that had been presented. If the presenter has a low tone of voice the audience may not be able to hear the presenter and the oral presentation will not be effective (Newman *et al.*, 2016). However, the presenters must not be too loud or the audience will be irritated and lose interest to be engaged to the oral presentation. According to Van Den Stock *et al.* (2007) there is a right volume for tone of voice to work engaging with a large crowd. The basic understanding is that the tone of voice must loud and clear.

### *2.3.4. Proxemics*

**Proxemics** is a study of space between the speaker and the hearer to show closeness. These two types of cues are used in a presentation depending on the context of the oral presentation (Hall *et al.*, 2005). Usually, there are two or more participants in a group presentation. This shows the chemistry between group members can also ignite the attention of the audience to be more engaged to the presentation.

### *2.3.5. Chronemic*

**Chronemic** is a study of how time affects communication. Based on a study by Burgoon *et al.* (2016) this also includes how different time cycles affect communication This includes the differences between people who are past or future oriented and cultural perspectives on time. Fixed and measured known as monochronic or fluid and adaptable are known as polychronic.

## *2.4. Past Studies*

The study by DeGroot and Gooty (2009) Looked at the use of nonverbal cues in job interview. This study also analyzed the importance of nonverbal cues but in a different perspective which is employment. The research investigated the importance of nonverbal cues and how they are related to employment. This research reported that that impression is important when going for job interview, and this is similar to oral presentation. Good impression will make a good oral presentation. Nonverbal cues are important in making this impression because nonverbal cues will aid the person to be prepared and strategize their impression toward others.

Next, the study by Grez *et al.* (2012) investigated the use of nonverbal cues in customer satisfaction This research is done to see how nonverbal cues can help establish trust and a long lasting relationship with clients or customers. This research used the exploratory analysis to test validity and reliability of the measuring tools and all of this is done through principal components analysis. The study also found that nonverbal cues greatly influence customer satisfaction. The most significant cues are the body language, spatial language and appearance greatly influence the customer trust and in addition they can also impact the long-term relationship with the customer. This research is done to find a way to strengthen that relationship with the customer and also contribute to the growth and development of the consulting industry by filling the existing gap in the literature.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

This quantitative study is done to identify the issue of why university students are not using the nonverbal cues correctly during an oral presentation. It is also to identify the knowledge of the students on nonverbal cues. The population suitable for this study is university students. The sample chosen is a group of study is students who attended an oral presentation. The instrument for this study is a survey with 3 sections; section A is about demographic profile of the respondents, section B is about the use of vicalics and section c is about the use of kinesics in oral presentation.

50 students responded in the survey on “The Use of Verbal Oral Presentation” done after the students completed a semester of oral presentation class. Data from the survey is analysed based on the frequency of responses and presented in the form of percentages.

### 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1. Introduction

This section discusses the findings of the study based on the research questions presented in the previous section. To begin with the demographic profiles of the respondents are first presented. Date analysed from the responses is presented in Figure 1 below.

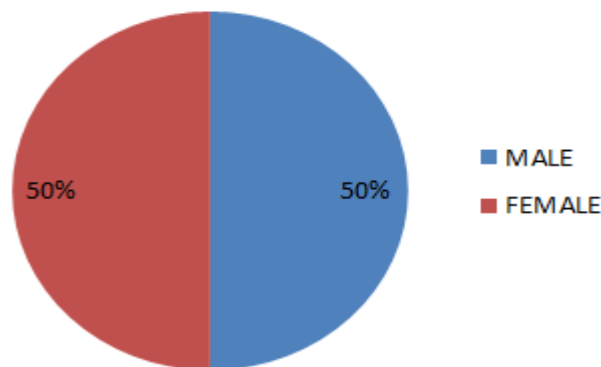


Figure-1. Distribution of Gender (data from survey “The Use of Oral presentation “ in this study)

As displayed by Figure 1 above, this research chosen to have the equal number of male and female gender in order to identify how nonverbal cues differ between genders. There are 30 people in total who have answered the survey, 15 male and 15 female.

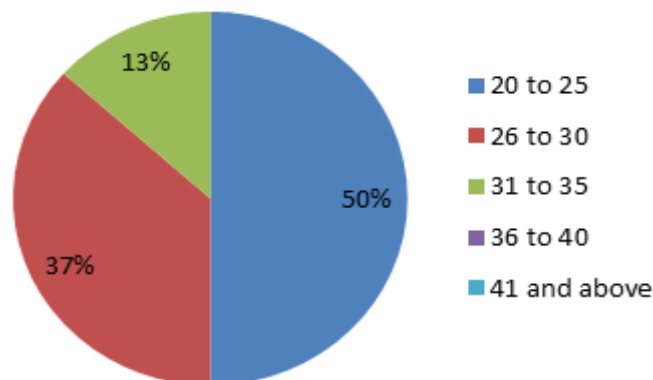


Figure-2. Distribution of Age (data from survey “The Use of Oral presentation “ in this study)

Based on Figure 2 above, we can see the survey is mostly answered by the people who are at age of 20 to 25 years old with the total of 50%. This is because this research is focus on the students who are currently in higher education, which has done a number of oral presentations for their studies, and mostly these students are at the age of 20 to 30 years old.

4.2. Oral Presentation And Kinesics

Research Question 1: In what ways does kinesics influence oral presentation?

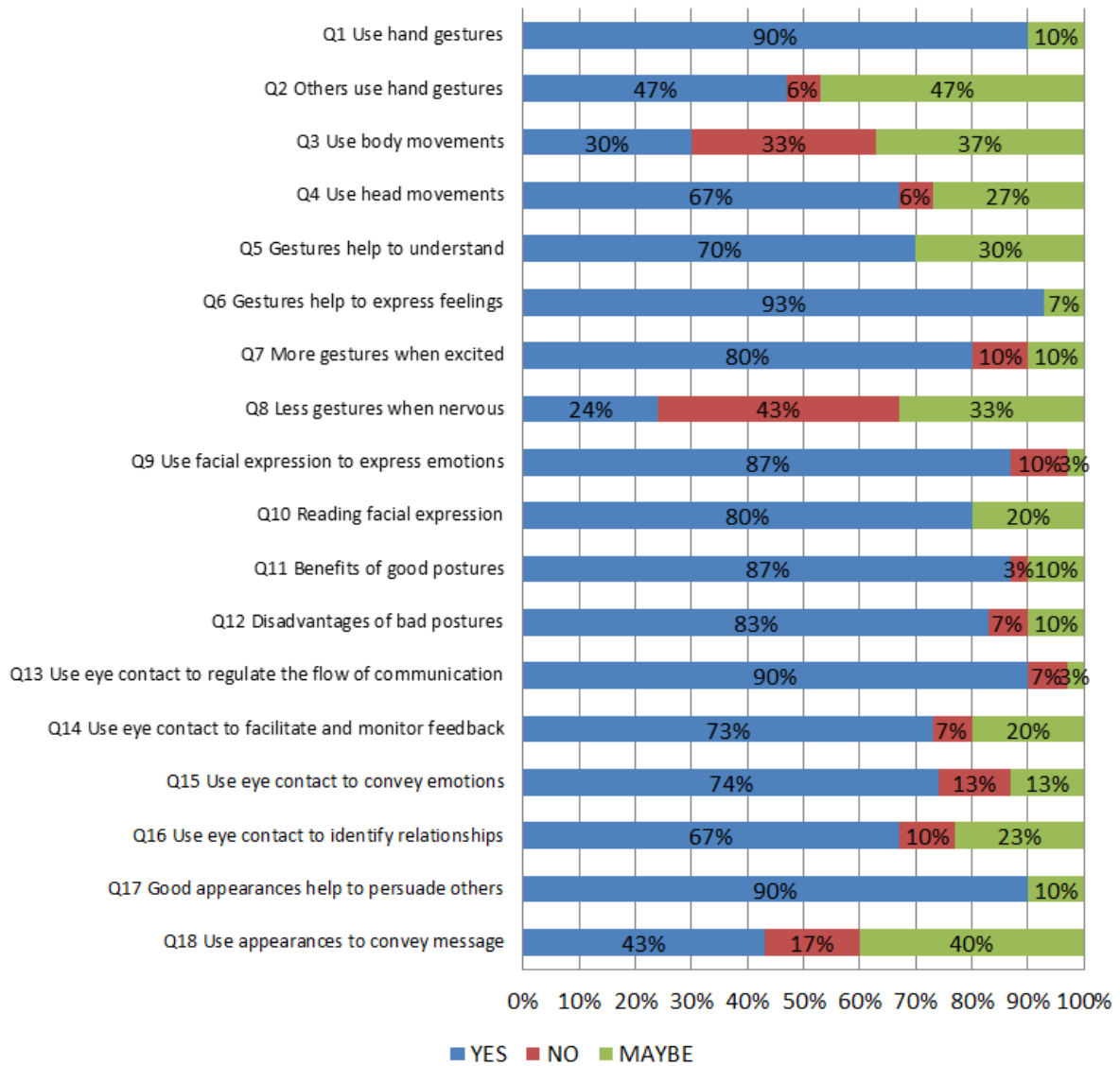


Figure-3. Kinesics (data from survey “The Use of Oral presentation “ in this study)

With reference to Figure 3, the highest percentage of ‘Yes’ falls to question ‘Q6 – Gestures to help express feelings’ with a total of 93%. This shows that the respondents knew that they used gestures to show how they felt. This happens because using gestures to express how they felt are like second nature to them. For example, slouching can be the indicator of the person feeling sad or depressed. This can also be applied in oral presentation. The presenter used gestures to show how they felt and also, so that the audience can also felt what the presenter



felt about the topic. This finding is in accordance with the study by [Burgoon et al. \(2016\)](#) who stated that gestures can help presenters to express feelings towards others.

Next, based on the Figure 3, the second highest percentage of ‘Yes’ came from the respondents ‘Q1 – Used hand gestures’, ‘Q13 – Use eye contact to regulate the flow of communication’, and ‘Q17 – Good appearance can help to persuade others’ had the total of 90%. This shows that the respondents used these nonverbal cues quite frequently. They used hand gestures to communicate with each other like waving goodbye or giving thumbs up to show approval. They may also use eye contact to regulate flow of communication like looking the other to signal pause of the conversation or opening the eye wide to increase the intensity of the conversation. Appearance can be used to persuade other is like a daily habit. Nonverbal cues an also be applied in oral presentation in order to improve the way the presenters present their topic. This can be done by using hand gestures to attract the attention of the audience, using eye to regulate the flow of the presentation and by adding of having a good appearance during the presentation. These can further improve not only the confidence of the presenter but also the confidence of the audience witnessing the presentation. These findings are in accordance with the study by [Yoon et al. \(2016\)](#) wo found that maintaining eye contact can help regulate the flow of the conversation with others and also with a proper appearance can help persuade others better.

With reference to Figure 3, the lowest percentage ‘Yes’ falls to ‘Q8 – Less gestures when nervous’ with the total 24% and also have the highest percentage ‘No’ with the total of 43%. This shows the respondents felt that they used more gestures when they felt nervous which contradicted with past research. This can be seen as time passes people will do more gestures when they feel nervous in order to get rid of that nervousness or it happened out of habit. This can also be seen during an oral presentation where the presenter played with their hands when they are feeling nervous. This finding is not in accordance with the study by [Burgoon et al. \(2016\)](#) that mentioned how people do fewer gestures when they are nervous.

#### 4.3. Oral Presentation and Vocalic

Research Question 2: In what ways does vocalic influence oral presentation?

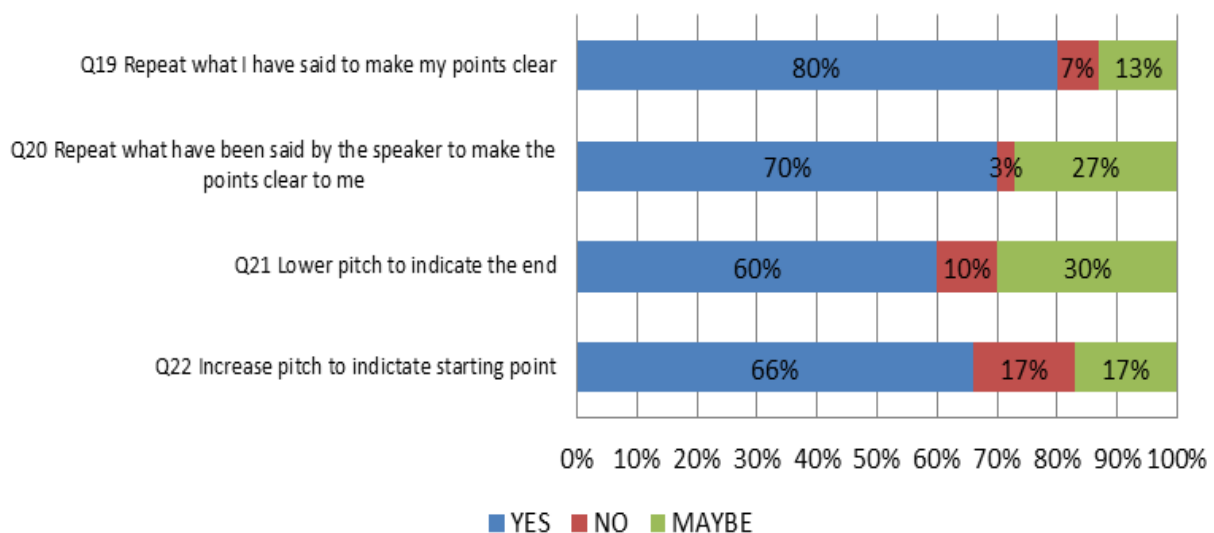


Figure-4. VOCALIC (data from survey “The Use of Oral presentation “ in this study)

Figure 4 showed the highest percentage of ‘Yes’ came from the question Q19 – Repeat what I have said to make my point clear with a total of 80%. This shows that the respondents knew that by doing repetition, they can make

their point much clearer so that the listener can fully understand the message. Repeating the same point can help to reinforce the understanding of the topic not only to the speaker but also to the listener. This is same as learning something new. By repeating the same thing over and over again, the new knowledge will eventually be much more understandable at some point. This finding is in accordance with the study by Lunenburg (2010) who stated that by repeating the same point the point made will make the message clearer.

Next, the lowest number of 'Yes', (Figure 4), came from question 'Q21 – Lower voice to indicate the end' with a total of 60%. Although the percentage is the lowest out all the questions, it still has more than the percentage of 'No' which have the total of 10% and also 'Maybe' which have the total of 30%. This means that respondents knew how to lower their voice and recognize the indication to show the end of the conversation or communication. This can also be applied in oral presentation by lowering the voice to signal the end of the presentation. This finding is in accordance with the study by Lunenburg (2010) who reported that the increase volume of the voice can show the start of a communication

#### 4.4. Kinesics Across Gender

Research Question 3: How does the use of kinesics differ across gender?

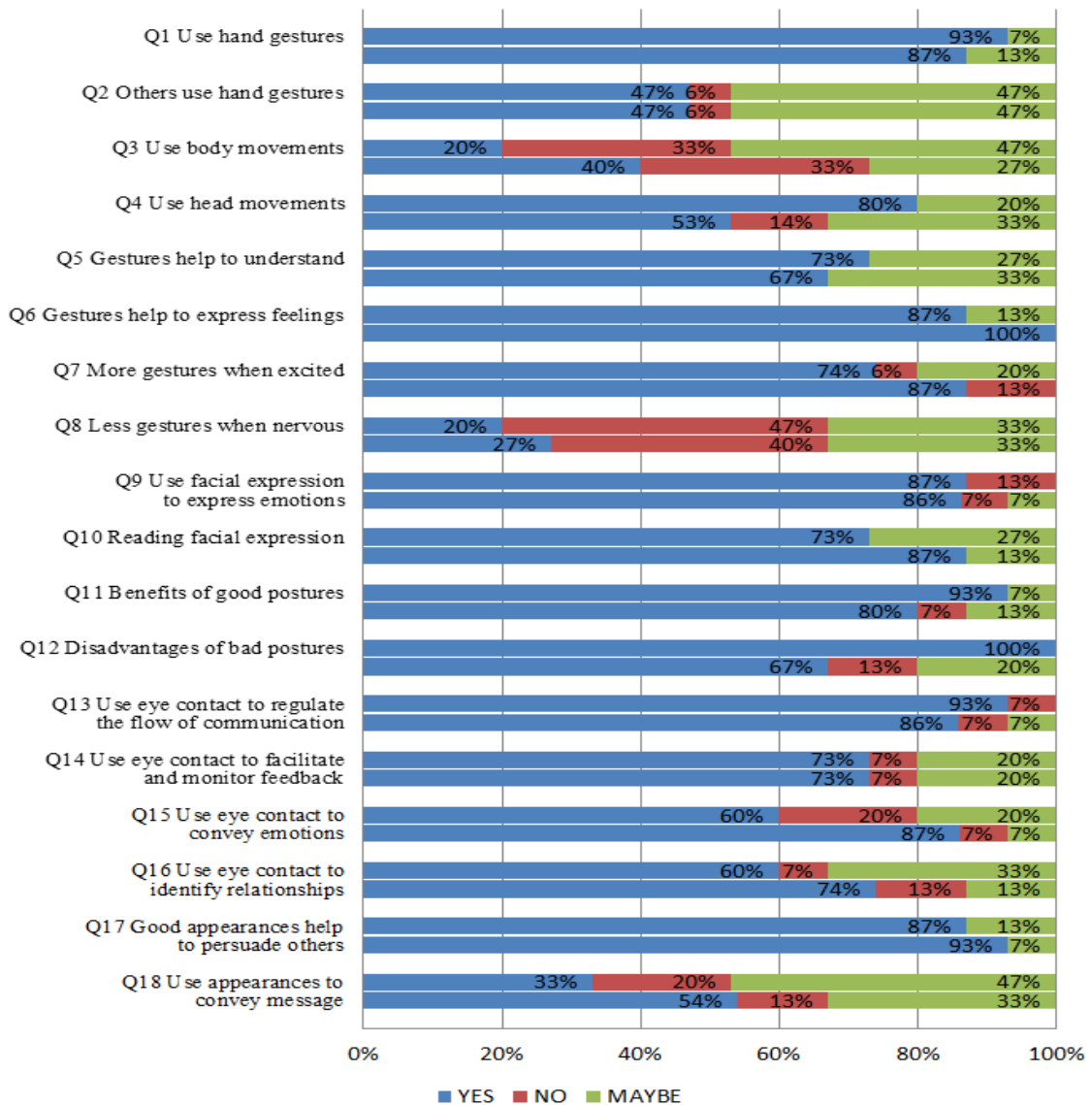


Figure-5. KISENICS (data from survey “The Use of Oral presentation “ in this study)

Figure 5 is displayed the result for Part B 'Kinesics'. These bars are split into two is to indicate the total for the female and the total male. The top bar represents the female gender and the bottom bar represents the male gender.

According to Figure 5, the highest percentage of 'Yes' for female came from the question 'Q12 – Disadvantages of bad postures' with a total of 100% while the male gender only have 67% with 13% total of 'No'. These result shows that the female gender knew the importance of having the good posture and the disadvantages of having poor postures than the male gender. On the other hand, bad postures can show low self-confidence and make the onlookers lose interest in the presentation,. This can also applied in oral presentation, by having a bad postures the audience will not feel the confident of the presenter and will start to lose interest in the presentation while having a good postures will not only make the audience to be more engaged to the presentation but also show the high self-confidence that presenter has.

Next, based on Figure 5, the highest percentage of 'Yes' for male came from the question 'Q6 – Gestures to help express feelings' with a total of 100% while the female has a total of 87% with 23% total of 'Maybe'. This shows that the male gender used gestures more to express feelings than female but not by many because a few female were unsure.. Gestures are important in oral presentation because it will help the presenter to show feelings towards the audience so that the audience can relate to those feelings.

Next, the lowest percentage of 'Yes' for female falls on question number 'Q8 – Less gesture when nervous', with a total of 20% and this is also the lowest number of 'Yes' for male also with a total of 27%. This shows that both genders feel that they make more gestures even when they are nervous. This is because both genders do more gestures when they are nervous out of habit or to get rid of the nervousness. When twiddling with their fingers or closing their eyes more than usual.

However there is another lowest number of 'Yes' for female which came from question 'Q3 – Use body movement' with a total of 20% while the male has 20% more. The result is caused by how the female gender felt that using their body to communicate seemed a bit inappropriate. It is important to know how to communicate using body movements because it is a skill that can help presenters in any situation even in an oral presentation, simple nodding 'Yes' to the correct answer could save time.

#### 4.5. Vocalic Across Gender

Research Question 4: How does the use of vocalic differ across gender?

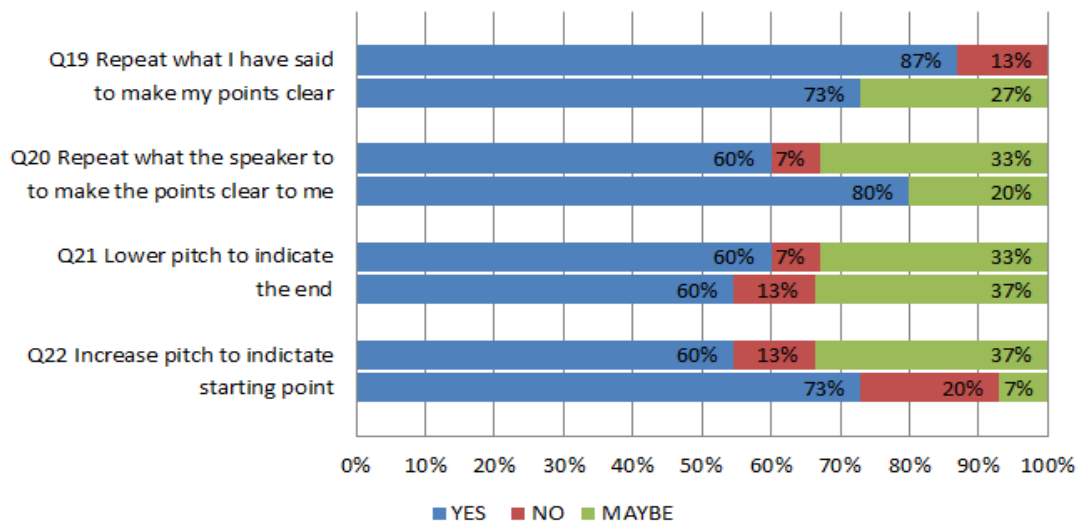


Figure-6.VOCALICS (data from survey "The Use of Oral presentation " in this study)

Figure 6 presents the result for Part C 'Vocalic' of the survey. The bars are split into two because it is to indicate the total for the female and male. The top bar represents the female gender and the bottom bar represents the male gender.

Based on Figure 6, the highest percentage of 'Yes' for female falls upon the question 'Q19 – Repeat what I have said to make my points clear that also include 13% of 'No'. While the male only has 73% of 'Yes' with a 27% of 'Maybe'. Nonetheless, repetition is important in oral presentation because it could help reinforce the point that is being delivered by the presenter in order to make the audience comprehend it better.

Next, as presented by Figure 6, the highest percentage of 'Yes' for the male gender comes from question 'Q20 – Repeat what the speaker has said to make the points clear to me' with a total of 80% while the female has a total of 60%. The gap is quite far with a total 20%. This shows that the male participants prefer to repeat the same thing to make themselves remember the point better than the female gender because there is a 20% 'Maybe' for the male gender that could had been 'Yes'.

Both genders have the lowest number of 'Yes' from the question 'Q21 – Lower speech to indicate the end' with a total of 60% for each gender. This shows that both genders have the same opinion on the subject matter. Even though it is only 60% it is still higher than their 'No'. Both genders agreed upon lowering their voices to indicate the end of a conversation or communication. This can also be applied in oral presentation because it will assist the presenter to signal the audience the end of the presentation.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

### *5.1. Summary of Findings*

#### *5.1.1. Kinesics*

From this study, most of the respondents knew how to used kinesics in their oral presentation but require a few more understanding in order to fully utilize the benefits of kinesics. The result also shows that the male gender used more physical movements than the female gender, this prove that the female gender may need a few more practices and knowledge of kinesics because it greatly influence oral presentations. These influences can further reinforce the message that is delivered verbally. That is the reason the understanding of kinesics is really important.

#### *5.1.2. Vocalic*

Vocalic is the study of paralanguage, which includes the vocal qualities that go along with verbal messages, such as pitch, volume, rate, vocal quality, and verbal fillers. Vocalics such as increase the volume of the voice to indicate the starting of the presentation and lowering the voice usually indicate the end of the presentation. From the result gained, most of the respondents still need to improve their understanding on vocalic in order to further utilize it in an oral presentation and both male and female genders need to practice more on vocalic in order to further improve their oral presentation skills.

### *5.2. Suggestions for Future Research*

Future research can include more nonverbal cues to their research so that others can gain more knowledge and understanding on the importance of nonverbal cues. Further studies could also be done on nonverbal cues to other ways of communication such interviews, teachings, meetings, and more. This can help others to see the how nonverbal cues can be applied in other situations.

In conclusion, nonverbal cues are important and very influential in oral presentation or any other means of communications. This knowledge and understanding can further improve the way of communication including

verbal communications. Nonverbal communication is considered as universal language and can be used to communicate globally as well as to overcome the barriers of communication with different cultures. The importance of understanding the influence of nonverbal cues not only applied to just oral presentation but as well as other available methods of communication.

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