

# An Analysis of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Strategies Performed in the Most Popular TED Talks as an Instructional Source

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## Abstract

Effective public speaking skills are essential for both personal and professional growth, yet English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners often struggle to communicate effectively due to the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. This study investigates the verbal and nonverbal communication strategies employed in 25 of the most popular TED Talks to provide instructional insights for EFL learners. Through content analysis, thirteen verbal communication strategies were identified, including the frequent use of humor (44.1%), questions (22.7%), and quotes (8.4%), which contribute to audience engagement and message clarity. Additionally, nine nonverbal strategies, such as body movements, facial expressions, and gestures, were observed, with verbs (32.1%), numbers (22.1%), and size (9.7%) being the most commonly utilized. These findings highlight the significant role that both verbal and nonverbal cues play in effective public speaking, emphasizing the importance of incorporating these strategies into EFL teaching materials. By understanding how TED speakers use these techniques, educators can develop more effective instructional materials, ultimately enhancing learners' public speaking skills and communicative competence in diverse contexts.

**Keywords:** verbal communication strategies, nonverbal communication strategies, TED Talks, EFL learners, public speaking, instructional materials

Effective communication is a continuous exchange of messages that facilitates the sharing of knowledge, ideas, information, feelings, emotions, and attitudes among individuals. Mastering communication skills is essential in both professional and academic spheres (Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2023). These skills serve as the foundation for successful interactions across various activities, such as presentations, public speaking, and the persuasive conveyance of ideas. In academia, communication skills contribute significantly to effective teaching and learning, enabling educators to articulate complex concepts clearly and foster an optimal learning environment. Similarly, students rely on these skills to engage with peers, participate in discussions, and confidently present their ideas.

For tertiary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, mastering oral presentation skills is crucial for both academic and professional advancement. In academic settings, students often need to present their research findings, ideas, and arguments to peers, professors, and academic panels. The ability to deliver clear, engaging, and persuasive presentations not only showcases their knowledge and expertise but also enhances their credibility and academic standing. Furthermore, effective oral presentations facilitate knowledge dissemination, promote critical thinking, and foster collaborative learning environments within academic institutions. However, many EFL learners struggle to communicate effectively in real-life situations due to discrepancies between their classroom-based language knowledge and the demands of real-world language use. Research studies have consistently highlighted the gap between language proficiency acquired in classroom settings and the ability to apply language skills in authentic communicative contexts (Brown, 2007; Ellis, 2008). This phenomenon, often referred to as the “knowing-doing gap” (Long, 1996), underscores the challenges faced by EFL learners in transferring their linguistic knowledge to real-life interactions.

This “knowing-doing gap” is particularly evident in the realm of public speaking, where students need to master a variety of verbal and nonverbal communication techniques to convey their ideas effectively. These techniques include crafting engaging speeches, selecting compelling topics, and utilizing appropriate gestures to enhance delivery (Rohmah, 2022). Nevertheless, instructors who teach public speaking and oral presentation courses frequently encounter challenges due to a lack of sufficient pedagogical resources (Li & Li, 2021). Existing instructional materials often fail to adequately cover

the diverse communication strategies employed in real-world contexts, making it difficult for teachers to provide comprehensive guidance to their students (Richards, 2015). Additionally, several studies emphasize the limited availability of interactive and engaging instructional materials that facilitate hands-on learning experiences, which are crucial for developing effective public speaking skills in EFL learners (Huang & Hung, 2010; Mishan & Timmis, 2015; Peregoy & Boyle, 2017; Reinders & White, 2011; Tomlinson, 2012). Moreover, many textbooks in the field of EFL instruction tend to prioritize the creation of speeches over the development of effective delivery skills (Fuyuno et al., 2018).

One potential approach to addressing these challenges is the use of TED Talk videos, which showcase engaging talks by proficient English speakers on diverse subjects, offering valuable material for enhancing students' communication abilities (Chang & Huang, 2015; Tilwani et al., 2022). Several studies have explored the pedagogical benefits of using TED Talks in language learning. For example, Chang and Huang (2015) conducted a corpus-based move analysis and found that TED Talks effectively model the structure and delivery of persuasive speeches, making them ideal for teaching presentation skills. Similarly, Tilwani et al. (2022) demonstrated that TED Talks can enhance listening comprehension and provide exposure to authentic language use in diverse contexts. Despite these advantages, existing research has largely focused on analyzing the structure and content of TED Talks rather than examining the specific communication strategies employed by speakers.

Although TED Talks are renowned for their exemplary communication, they can pose significant challenges for EFL learners. The intricate language structures and advanced communication tactics used in these presentations can be daunting, making it difficult for EFL learners to grasp vocabulary complexities, idiomatic expressions, and subtle rhetorical devices. Moreover, the fast-paced delivery and dense content of TED Talks require a high level of language proficiency. Consequently, while researchers have explored the use of TED Talk videos in language classrooms through corpus-based move analysis, there remains a gap in understanding the communication strategies employed by TED speakers (Chang & Huang, 2015). Further research is necessary to investigate how both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies used in TED Talks can be adapted and taught to EFL learners to enhance their public speaking and communication skills.

This study focuses on communication strategies (CSs) because previous research has predominantly addressed linguistic competence among Thai EFL learners. While much of the research has centered on enhancing linguistic competence (Pornpibul, 2014), other dimensions of communicative competence have been relatively neglected. By shifting the focus to CSs, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Thai learners navigate various communication challenges beyond mere linguistic proficiency. Understanding and honing CSs are vital for effective communication in real-world settings, where linguistic accuracy alone may not suffice to convey intended meanings or interact successfully with others. Therefore, this study not only fills a critical gap in literature but also offers insights that can inform more holistic approaches to language education, ultimately enhancing learners' communicative competence in diverse contexts.

The current study seeks to address this gap by investigating both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies utilized in popular TED Talks. By analyzing persuasive language and identifying verbal and nonverbal cues, this research aims to benefit researchers, individuals interested in public speaking, and educators designing courses to enhance students' presentation skills and creative thinking. The following research questions will guide the investigation:

1. What are the most frequent verbal communication strategies used by speakers in popular TED Talks?
2. How do nonverbal communication strategies contribute to the effectiveness of TED Talks?

### **Public Speaking Skills and TED Talks**

The art of public speaking, commonly understood as the skill of orally presenting a topic or issue to an audience, has evolved significantly over time. Initially articulated by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, the foundational principles of public speaking remain relevant today. Aristotle's Three Basic Parts of Persuasion—comprising ethos, logos, and pathos—continue to underpin successful public speeches (Su-Hie, 2018).

With the advent of mass media, particularly the Internet, public speaking has become more accessible and influential than ever. It has transitioned from a skill reserved for the elite to a vital tool for marketing, education, and brand promotion in business. One notable evolution is TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) Talks, which have emerged as a remarkable platform for disseminating impactful

ideas and demonstrating effective public speaking. These talks have garnered significant global recognition and are regarded as exemplars of persuasive communication. Given their widespread accessibility, TED Talks serve as a unifying force, bridging diverse communities and individuals through the power of spoken ideas.

Numerous studies have explored the application of TED Talks as learning materials for EFL learners, highlighting their potential as authentic resources that expose learners to natural language use, diverse accents, and real-world communication strategies. For instance, Chang and Huang (2015) found that incorporating TED Talks in EFL classrooms improved students' oral presentation skills, providing them with practical models of effective public speaking. Similarly, Tran and Duong (2018) noted that regular exposure to TED Talks enhanced learners' listening comprehension, enabling them to develop a better understanding of authentic language patterns. Maria, Junior, and Astrid (2018) demonstrated that TED Talks can effectively enhance communicative skills, including listening and speaking, among EFL students, emphasizing the importance of incorporating authentic materials to foster better engagement and understanding of real-world communication.

Further supporting this perspective, Carlo (2015) conducted a case study focusing on the use of pathos, one of Aristotle's rhetorical strategies, in TED Talks. Carlo's findings revealed that speakers strategically employed emotionally impactful elements, such as simple language, metaphors, analogies, storytelling, humor, and personal experiences, to create an emotional connection with their audience. This use of pathos effectively enhanced audience engagement and understanding, demonstrating the importance of integrating emotional appeal into public speaking. Similarly, Karnyushima et al. (2018) identified various linguistic strategies used by TED speakers to achieve persuasive intentions, including the use of rhyme, rhetorical questions, repetition, and the introduction of new information to capture and maintain audience attention. These findings highlight the deliberate use of linguistic devices to influence attitudes, emotions, and engagement in public speaking.

Carette (2018) further contributed to this body of research by examining the strategies employed by TED speakers in the opening and closing segments of their talks. The study found that speakers commonly used anecdotes, questions, and humor to capture audience interest in the opening, while signals, calls to action, and discourse

markers were prevalent in the closing sections. This suggests that TED speakers employ specific strategies to structure their talks in a way that ensures message retention and impact. Interestingly, the study also noted that the use of quotes was absent in openings, even though quotes are often considered effective in traditional public speaking contexts, indicating a preference for other methods to engage audiences.

Moreover, Kurniawan (2021) examined the delivery strategies utilized by TED speakers, focusing on nonverbal and paraverbal components such as pace, volume, gestures, and eye contact. The study revealed that maintaining a normal pace of speech and clear articulation contributed to audience comprehension and engagement. Additionally, the use of hand gestures, particularly finger pointing, emphasized key points, while consistent eye contact helped capture and maintain audience attention. These findings suggest that nonverbal communication strategies are essential elements of effective public speaking and can significantly impact audience engagement.

In addition to these studies, Rudneva et al. (2019) explored how TED Talks can be integrated into university-level language learning to improve listening comprehension, suggesting that exposure to these talks provides learners with authentic language patterns that are beneficial for EFL learners. Nguyen and Boers (2019) also examined the effect of content retelling on vocabulary uptake from TED Talks, demonstrating that this technique can improve vocabulary acquisition, which in turn supports listening comprehension and the ability to understand authentic spoken language.

Recognizing the educational value of TED Talks, reputable publishers like National Geographic Learning have integrated them into their EFL textbooks, such as the “Pathways: Listening, Speaking, and Critical Thinking” series (National Geographic Learning, 2020). This integration provides learners with structured opportunities to engage with TED Talks, allowing them to practice listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills in real-world contexts. However, despite the widespread use of TED Talks in educational settings, some studies suggest that EFL learners still face challenges in understanding advanced vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and complex rhetorical devices. This highlights a need for further research on how TED Talks can be systematically integrated into EFL curricula to help learners develop effective communication strategies more holistically, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal elements.

## **Non-verbal Communication in Public Speaking**

In contemporary professional settings, effective public speaking involves a combination of verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal communication strategies. Verbal communication encompasses the content of the message, including elements such as humor, questions, and answers (Ridao, 2017), while paraverbal communication involves vocal elements like tone, pitch, and speed, influencing how the message is perceived (Negi, 2009). Nonverbal communication includes facial expressions, gestures, posture, and eye contact, playing a significant role in conveying emotions and attitudes (Gregersen, 2007). Research by Mehrabian (1972) emphasizes the importance of nonverbal cues, suggesting that only 7% of a message is conveyed through words, while 38% is transmitted through vocal elements and 55% through body language. This underscores the necessity of understanding both verbal and nonverbal strategies for effective public speaking, especially for EFL learners.

Several studies have examined the role of teaching these strategies to EFL learners, emphasizing the positive impact they have on learners' communicative competence. Nguyen and Boers (2019) found that EFL learners who received training in both verbal and nonverbal strategies showed significant improvements in overall communication skills. However, their study revealed that current teaching materials often lack structured content that addresses the interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements, leaving learners with an incomplete understanding of how these strategies function together in real-world communication.

Similarly, Ghanizadeh and Royaei (2015) highlighted that integrating nonverbal communication training into language instruction led to a notable increase in learners' willingness to communicate and overall confidence. Despite these benefits, the study pointed out that most instructional materials for EFL learners predominantly focus on verbal aspects, neglecting the crucial nonverbal elements that contribute to effective communication. MacIntyre et al. (1998) further reinforced this perspective, noting that nonverbal cues significantly reduce communication apprehension among learners, yet are rarely incorporated into teaching resources.

Moreover, Gregersen (2007) emphasized that understanding nonverbal communication is essential for learners to convey emotions, attitudes, and intentions more effectively. However, despite its importance, nonverbal communication training is often overlooked in language



teaching, resulting in learners who are proficient in verbal skills but struggle to communicate effectively in authentic public speaking situations.

While these studies collectively highlight the value of integrating both verbal and nonverbal strategies into EFL instruction, there remains a significant gap in developing comprehensive materials that address these components holistically. Existing resources often treat verbal and nonverbal strategies in isolation, failing to provide learners with the tools to understand how these elements interact in real-world communication (Gorham, 1988). As a result, EFL learners are not fully equipped to deliver persuasive and impactful messages in public speaking contexts.

Given this gap, there is a pressing need for research that develops and evaluates teaching materials that incorporate both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies in a cohesive and structured manner. By addressing this need, EFL learners can be better prepared to navigate real-world communicative contexts, where the integration of verbal and nonverbal elements is crucial for delivering effective public speeches. Therefore, this study aims to analyze and integrate verbal and nonverbal strategies within EFL teaching materials, providing a more comprehensive approach to developing learners' public speaking skills.

In light of these considerations, this research will investigate how prospective professionals utilize a non-verbal approach, integrating elements such as gestures and movements in public speech, to determine their contributions to overall communicative success in persuasive communication. By doing so, the study aims to fill the gap in EFL instruction and offer practical insights for enhancing public speaking training.

### **Related Studies on Communication Strategies Performed in Public Speech**

The use of TED Talks as a medium for analyzing communication strategies has gained significant attention in recent years, offering insights into how effective public speakers engage and persuade their audiences. Carlo (2015) examined communicative strategies in TED Talks with a focus on Aristotle's theory of pathos, demonstrating that speakers strategically utilize emotionally impactful techniques to connect with their audience. By incorporating elements such as simple language, storytelling, humor, metaphors, and personal experiences,



TED speakers were able to evoke emotions and clarify complex concepts for a diverse audience. This study underscores the importance of pathos in public speaking and highlights how TED speakers adapt their language to appeal to a broad spectrum of listeners.

Similarly, Karnyushima et al. (2018) analyzed the linguistic strategies used by TED speakers to achieve persuasive intentions, revealing that speakers employ a range of linguistic techniques, including rhyme, rhetorical questions, repetition, and directives, to engage the audience and maintain their attention. Their study emphasized the role of linguistic devices in restructuring audience consciousness and activating engagement, demonstrating how TED speakers consciously use language to create an intimate and persuasive atmosphere. These findings reinforce the idea that verbal strategies are crucial for maintaining audience interest and enhancing the effectiveness of public speaking.

In contrast, Carette (2018) focused on the structure of TED Talks, investigating the strategies used in the opening and closing segments. The study found that anecdotes, questions, and startling statements were commonly used to capture audience attention at the beginning of speeches, while discourse markers, calls to action, and signals were frequently employed in the closing segments. This suggests that TED speakers are deliberate in structuring their presentations, using specific strategies to ensure their messages resonate with the audience. Interestingly, the study highlighted the absence of quotes in the opening sections, despite their frequent use in traditional public speaking contexts, suggesting that TED speakers may prioritize other methods to establish credibility and engage their audience.

Kurniawan (2021) expanded the analysis to nonverbal and paraverbal communication strategies, examining aspects such as pace, volume, gestures, and eye contact. The findings indicated that TED speakers typically maintain a moderate pace and volume, which aids in audience comprehension, and use hand gestures and eye contact effectively to emphasize key points and sustain engagement. However, the study noted that limited movement on stage might reduce viewer interest, indicating that nonverbal cues are as important as verbal ones in maintaining audience attention.

Collectively, these studies emphasize that successful communication in TED Talks involves a strategic combination of verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal strategies. While they offer valuable insights into how speakers achieve engagement and persuasion, they also highlight the

complexity of public speaking, where verbal and nonverbal elements must work in harmony to deliver impactful messages. Despite the comprehensive analysis of TED Talks presented in these studies, there remains a gap in how these strategies can be systematically taught to EFL learners to improve their own public speaking skills. This gap underscores the need for further research that integrates both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies into instructional materials, offering learners a more holistic understanding of how to engage and persuade an audience, as exemplified by TED speakers.

By synthesizing the findings from these studies, the present research aims to investigate how the identified communication strategies can be adapted and applied to EFL contexts, providing a structured approach to enhancing learners' public speaking and presentation skills.

## **Methodology**

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in communication strategies research, drawing on the models developed by Carlo (2015) and Carette (2018) as the primary lenses for analyzing verbal and nonverbal communication strategies in TED Talks.

Carlo's (2015) framework focuses on the use of rhetorical devices and emotional appeals, particularly pathos, to engage audiences in public speaking. This framework is highly relevant to the current study as it provides a comprehensive understanding of how speakers employ various verbal strategies, such as humor, analogies, metaphors, storytelling, and anecdotes, to make their messages more persuasive and relatable. By incorporating this framework, the study aims to analyze how TED speakers use these rhetorical devices to create emotional connections with their audiences, offering valuable insights for EFL learners who often struggle with engaging their listeners in a second language.

Carette's (2018) framework, on the other hand, provides a detailed analysis of strategies used in the opening and closing sections of speeches, highlighting the importance of structuring presentations effectively to capture and retain audience attention. This framework identifies common strategies such as startling statements, calls to action, and hopes for a better future, which are essential for crafting impactful introductions and conclusions. Incorporating Carette's model into the current study enables a more nuanced examination of how TED speakers

structure their talks to maximize audience engagement, a skill that is particularly crucial for EFL learners who wish to develop effective public speaking skills.

In addition to these frameworks, this study also draws on theories of nonverbal communication, particularly the work of Mehrabian (1972), who emphasized that nonverbal elements—such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language—significantly impact the effectiveness of communication. By integrating this nonverbal communication theory, the study aims to analyze how TED speakers use nonverbal cues to complement their verbal messages, thereby enhancing the overall persuasiveness of their speeches. This aspect of the framework is crucial for EFL learners, as understanding and mastering nonverbal communication can help them convey their messages more effectively, even when their linguistic proficiency may be limited.

### ***Data collection***

The sample for this study comprises the 25 most popular TED talks of all time, as listed on the official TED website ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)). TED is a non-profit organization with the primary goal of disseminating influential content to a wide audience, as suggested by their slogan ‘Ideas Worth Spreading.’ These talks are delivered by experts from various fields including scientists, philanthropists, musicians, business and religious leaders, philosophers, etc. The conferences are recorded and made available for free on the website, allowing internet users easy access. Table 1 provides an overview of the 25 selected TED talks investigated in this study.

**Table 1**

*The Details of the Sample of Study*

No.	Title	Speaker's Name	Duration
1.	Do schools kill creativity?	Sir Ken Robinson	19:11
2.	Your body language may shape who you are	Amy Cuddy	20:45
3.	How great leaders inspire action	Simon Sinek	17:74
4.	The power of vulnerability	Berné Brown	20:02
5.	Inside the mind of a master of procrastinator	Tim Urban	13:54

**Table 1***The Details of the Sample of Study (Cont.)*

No.	Title	Speaker's Name	Duration
6.	How to speak so that people want to listen	Julian Treasure	09:44
7.	The next outbreak? We're not ready	Bill Gates	08:23
8.	Looks aren't everything. Believe me, I'm a model.	Cameron Russell	09:20
9.	What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness	Robert Waldinger	12:37
10.	10 things you didn't know about orgasm	Mary Roach	16:23
11.	How to spot a liar	Pamela Meyer	18:33
12.	The art of misdirection	Apollo Robbins	08:33
13.	How I held my breath for 17 minutes - David Blaine	David Blaine	20:02
14.	The power of introverts	Susan Cain	18:47
15.	My stroke of insight	Jill Bolte Taylor	18:24
16.	The puzzle of motivation	Dan Pink	18:22
17.	Strange answers to the psychopath test	Jon Ronson	17:44
18.	How to make stress your friend	Kelly McGonigal	14:15
19.	The danger of a single story	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	18:32
20.	The happy secret to better work	Shawn Achor	12:03
21.	10 ways to have a better conversation	Celeste Headlee	11:20
22.	Grit: The power of passion and perseverance	Angela Lee Duckworth	05:59
23.	Your elusive creative genius	Elizabeth Gilbert	19:14
24.	The surprising science of happiness	Dan Gilbert	20:51
25.	The thrilling potential of Sixth Sense technology	Pranav Mistry	13:33

*Note.* The data retrieved on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022

**Research Procedure**

After collecting the 25 videos, the next step involved obtaining and copying the transcripts of the talks into Word documents for manual analysis. Typically, transcripts can be found beneath the corresponding video on the TED website. Once the transcripts were properly documented, manual analysis would be conducted. Verbal communicative strategies would be identified and annotated within square brackets, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

Good morning. How are you? (Audience: "Good.") It's been great, hasn't it? [Question] I've been blown away by the whole thing. In fact, I'm leaving. (Laughter) [Humor] There have been three themes running through the conference, which are relevant to what I want to talk about. One is the extraordinary evidence of human creativity in all of the presentations that we've had and in all of the people here; just the variety of it and the range of it. The second is that it's put us in a place where we have no idea what's going to happen in terms of the future. No idea how this may play out. I have an interest in education. Actually, what I find is, everybody has an interest in education. Don't you? [Question] I find this very interesting. If you're at a dinner party, and you say you work in education -- actually, you're not often at dinner parties, frankly. [Humor]

*Do schools kill creativity?* Sir Ken Robinson

Three researchers with expertise in communication and language studies were involved in the coding process. Prior to coding, researchers underwent comprehensive training sessions to familiarize themselves with the coding framework and procedures. This training aimed to promote a shared understanding of the coding criteria and minimize potential biases in the analysis.

While a kappa coefficient was not utilized, measures were implemented to ensure the reliability of the coding process. Regular meetings were held among the researchers to discuss coding discrepancies and resolve any disagreements through consensus. Additionally, coding guidelines were refined iteratively based on feedback and discussion among the research team.

To enhance transparency and reproducibility, excerpts from the transcripts were included in the coding documentation to illustrate the application of the coding criteria. This facilitated a clear understanding of how communication strategies were identified and categorized. The detailed coding documentation, along with the finalized coding

framework, is available for review to ensure the integrity of the coding process.

### ***Data Analysis***

Content analysis is the primary technique utilized in this study. For verbal communicative strategies, each TED Talk was transcribed verbatim to ensure that all verbal content was accurately captured. This process involved reading through the transcriptions multiple times and highlighting segments that corresponded to different communication strategies using the research frameworks developed by Carlo (2015) and Carette (2018).

Based on the initial coding, a coding scheme was developed. This involved grouping similar codes into broader categories or themes. The following categories were identified as significant communication strategies:

1. Analogies and Metaphors: The use of analogies and metaphors to explain complex ideas.
2. Anecdotes: Short, personal stories or anecdotes used to underscore key messages.
3. Benefit: Highlighting the advantages or positive outcomes of a particular action, idea, or concept.
4. Call for Actions: Statements urging the audience to take specific actions.
5. Directive Address: Directly addressing the audience to guide their thinking or actions.
6. Hopes for a Better Future: Aspirational statements about potential improvements or positive changes.
7. Humor: Instances where humor was used to engage the audience and illustrate points.
8. Problem-Raising: Identifying and highlighting issues or challenges.
9. Questions: The use of questions to prompt audience reflection and engagement.
10. Quotes: The inclusion of quotes from notable individuals or sources.
11. Self-experiences: Personal experiences shared by the speaker to illustrate points.
12. Startling Statements: Shocking or surprising statements designed to grab attention.

13. Stories: Longer, more detailed narratives used to convey messages.

Regarding nonverbal communicative strategies, data analysis involved observing the speaker’s posture and gestures. The focus of this study was to examine how TED speakers use nonverbal strategies to reinforce and complement their verbal messages. Although the identified themes (e.g., verbs, numbers, size) might initially seem to pertain to verbal communication, their nonverbal manifestations were analyzed in the context of how they enhance the delivery and impact of verbal messages.

Results

*Verbal Communication Strategies in TED Talks Performed in the Most Popular Ted Talks*

In this section, three most frequently used verbal communicative strategies were humors (44.1%), questions (22.71%), and quotes (8.4%) respectively. The three less frequently used communicative strategies were directive address (0.44%), benefit (0.44%), and problem-raising (0.15%) respectively.

**Table 2**  
*Summary of Verbal Communicative Strategies*

Communicative Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Humors	299	44.1
Questions	154	22.71
Quote	57	8.4
Anecdote	45	6.63
Self-experiences	42	6.2
Stories	28	4.12
Call for actions	18	2.65
Analogies and metaphor	12	1.8
Startling statement	11	1.62
Hopes for a better future	5	0.74
Directive Address	3	0.44
Benefit	3	0.44
Problem-raising	1	0.15
<b>Total</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>100</b>



### ***Communicative Strategies***

1. Humor: In this study, the most frequently used verbal communicative strategies was humor (44.1%). The examples the use of humors in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

Actually, you're not often at dinner parties, frankly. (Laughter)  
[Humor] – *Do schools kill creativity?* Sir Ken Robinson

So, we're really fascinated with body language, and we're particularly interested in other people's body language. You know, we're interested in, like, you know — (Laughter) [Humor] – *Your body language may shape who you are.* Amy Cuddy

2. Questions: In this study, question was found in verbal communicative strategies (22.71%). The examples the use of question in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

If you use them poorly, bad idea. Right? [Question] – *Your body language may shape who you are.* Amy Cuddy

Why would you buy one from a computer company? [Question] – *How great leaders inspire action.* Simon Sinek

3. Quote: In this study, quote was found in verbal communicative strategies (8.4%). The examples the use of quote in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

As Jeffrey Moore calls it, "Crossing the Chasm" [Quote] – *How great leaders inspire action.* Simon Sinek

I'd like to close with a quote from Mark Twain. More than a century ago, he was looking back on his life, and he wrote this: "There isn't time, so brief is life, for bickerings, apologies, heartburnings, callings to account. There is only time for loving, and but an instant, so to speak, for that." [Quote] – *What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness.* Robert Waldinger

4. Anecdote: In this study, anecdote was found in verbal communicative strategies (6.63%). The examples of the use of anecdote in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

Why is Apple so innovative? Year after year, after year, they're more innovative than all their competition. And yet, they're just a computer company. They're just like everyone else. They have the same access to the same talent, the same agencies, the same consultants, the same media. [Anecdote] – *How great leaders inspire action*. Simon Sinek

And they were all writing, saying the same thing: "I have this problem too." But what struck me was the contrast between the light tone of the post and the heaviness of these emails. These people were writing with intense frustration about what procrastination had done to their lives, about what this Monkey had done to them. [Anecdote] – *Inside the mind of a master procrastinator*. Tim Urban

5. Self-experiences: In this study, self-experience was found in verbal communicative strategies (6.2%). The examples of the use of self-experiences in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

When I was a kid, the disaster we worried about most was a nuclear war. That's why we had a barrel like this down in our basement, filled with cans of food and water. When the nuclear attack came, we were supposed to go downstairs, hunker down, and eat out of that barrel. [Self-experience] – *The next outbreak? We're not ready*. Bill Gates

Let me tell you something: you know who you are when you call your friends and say, "I think I need to see somebody. Do you have any recommendations?" Because about five of my friends were like, "Wooo, I wouldn't want to be your therapist." [Self-experience] – *The power of vulnerability*. Brené Brown

6. Stories: In this study, story was found in verbal communicative strategies (4.12%). The examples the use of story in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

But unfortunately, I have to inform you that in 2007, a very inspired NYU Ph.D. student counted all the models on the runway, every single one that was hired, and of the 677 models that were hired, only 27, or less than four percent, were non-white. [Story] – *Looks aren't everything. Believe me, I'm a model*. Cameron Russell

There was a recent survey of millennials asking them what their most important life goals were, and over 80 percent said that a major life goal for them was to get rich. And another 50 percent of those same young adults said that another major life goal was to become famous. [Story] – *What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness*. Robert Waldinger

7. Call for actions: In this study, call for action was found in verbal communicative strategies (2.65%). The examples the use of call for action in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

So what I'm going to do is I'm going to show you two patterns of deception. And then we're going to look at the hot spots and see if we can find them ourselves. [Call to action] – *How to spot a liar*. Pamela Meyer

We have to rethink the fundamental principles on which we're educating our children. [Call to action] – *Do schools kill creativity?*. Sir Ken Robinson

8. Analogies and metaphor: In this study, analogy and metaphor was found in verbal communicative strategies (1.8%). The examples the use of analogy and metaphor in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

Light burned my brain like wildfire, [Analogy and metaphor] – *My stroke of insight*. Jill Bolte Taylor

This is called the candle problem. [Analogy and metaphor] – *The puzzle of motivation*. Dan Pink

9. Startling statement: In this study, startling statement was found in verbal communicative strategies (1.62%). The examples the use of startling statement in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

If you do this, then you get that -- work in some circumstances. But for a lot of tasks, they actually either don't work or, often, they do harm. This is one of the most robust findings in social science, and also one of the most ignored. [Startling statement] – *The puzzle of motivation*. Dan Pink

You're a failure! [Startling statement] – *Strange answers to the psychopath test*. Jon Ronson

10. Hopes for a better future: In this study, hope for a better future was found in verbal communicative strategies (0.74%). The examples the use of hope for a better future in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

I believe that the more time we spend choosing to run the deep inner-peace circuitry of our right hemispheres, the more peace we will project into the world, and the more peaceful our planet will be. And I thought that was an idea worth spreading. [Hopes for a better future] – *My stroke of insight*. Jill Bolte Taylor

I'm hoping that if you learn to tweak this a little bit, it could significantly change the way your life unfolds. [Hope for the better future] – *Your body language may shape who you are*. Amy Cuddy

11. Directive Address: In this study, directive address was found in verbal communicative strategies (0.44%). The examples the use of directive address in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

If you look at most of the world's major religions, you will find seekers — Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad — seekers who are going off by themselves alone to the wilderness, where they then have profound epiphanies and revelations that they then bring back to the rest of the community. [Directive Address] – *The power of introverts*. Susan Cain

You can start painting on any wall. You stop by a wall, and start painting on that wall. [Directive Address] – *The thrilling potential of SixthSense technology*. Pranav Mistry

12. Benefit: In this study, benefit was found in verbal communicative strategies (0.44%). The examples the use of benefit in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

So, quite understandably, qualities like magnetism and charisma suddenly come to seem really important. And sure enough, the self-help books change to meet these new needs and they start to have names like "How to Win Friends and Influence People." [Benefit] – *The power of introverts*. Susan Cain

And to my mind, that new operating system for our businesses revolves around three elements: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Autonomy: the urge to direct our own lives. Mastery: the desire to get better and better at something that matters. Purpose: the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves. These are the building blocks of an entirely new operating system for our businesses. [Benefit] – *The puzzle of motivation*. Dan Pink

13. Problem-raising: In this study, problem-raising was found in verbal communicative strategies (0.15%). The examples the use of problem-raising in the verbal communicative strategies as follows:

The problem is to remain an artist as we grow up. I believe this passionately, that we don't grow into creativity, we grow out of it. [Problem-raising] – *Do schools kill creativity?* Sir Ken Robinson

### ***The Use of Nonverbal Communication Strategies on TED Talks***

In this section, nonverbal communication strategies used by each speaker are reported to see how gestures and body movement reinforce and complement the words they said during their talks. According to Table 4.3, the results of the analysis on the use of non-verbal discourse communicative strategies indicate that the three most frequently utilized strategies were verbs (32.09%), numbers (22.09%), and size (9.7%), respectively. Conversely, the three least frequently employed strategies were personal pronouns (5.97%), body language (2.24%), and questions (1.49%), respectively.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Non-verbal Discourse Communicative Strategies*

Types of Representation	Frequency	Percentage
Verb	43	32.09
Number	30	22.09
Size	13	9.7
Direction / Location	12	9
Noun	12	9

**Table 3**  
*Summary of Non-verbal Discourse Communicative Strategies (Cont.)*

Types of Representation	Frequency	Percentage
Mental status	11	8.21
Personal pronoun	8	5.97
Body	3	2.24
Question	2	1.49
<b>Total</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>100</b>

**Figure 1** The examples demonstrate the use of verbs in the nonverbal communicative strategies in TED Talks.



**Figure 2** the examples the use of number in the nonverbal communicative strategies in TED Talks.



**Figure 3** The examples demonstrate the use of size in the nonverbal communicative strategies in TED Talks.




**Figure 4** the examples the use of number in the nonverbal communicative strategies in TED Talks.





But I recited a cheer. I recited  
a cheer along with everybody else.

A man with dark hair, wearing a black t-shirt and a small microphone, is speaking on a stage. He has his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a solid blue color. A subtitle is visible at the bottom of the frame.

like how someone like me  
could spend two weeks





## Discussion

### *The Effective Verbal Communication Strategies in Popular TED Talks*

TED talks heavily rely on various verbal strategies, with humor, any form of communication that is perceived as humorous (Martineau 1972), notably standing out, constituting an impressive 42.35% of all strategies employed in the most popular TED talks of all time category. Humor serves various roles, which can be categorized into four main functions: identification, clarification, enforcement, and differentiation, as observed by Meyer (2000). These functions include fostering connections between individuals (identification), simplifying intricate concepts (clarification), emphasizing important points (enforcement), and highlighting differences (differentiation). When audiences respond with laughter, they not only engage with the speaker and the subject matter but also signify key insights gained from the presentation. According to Crawford (1994), humor encompasses both nonverbal and verbal communications that elicit a positive cognitive or affective response from listeners. The appreciation for humor's ability to introduce levity is not merely theoretical but is widely acknowledged by those who have experienced TED talks. The versatility of humor may be a key factor in its preference in TED talks.

Recognizing the value of humor in presentations, educators can implement various strategies to help students develop this skill. One approach is to encourage students to observe and analyze humorous elements in TED talks or other presentations, identifying techniques such as wordplay, irony, or exaggeration. By deconstructing humor in existing speeches, students can gain insights into how to use humor strategically in their own presentations. Additionally, educators can provide opportunities for students to practice incorporating humor into their presentations through activities such as improvisation exercises, where students can experiment with different comedic styles and delivery techniques in a supportive environment. Furthermore, offering constructive feedback and encouragement can help students refine their comedic timing and delivery.

Questions represent a vital strategy, comprising 22.66% of the most popular TED talks of all time category. A question speech act encompasses inquiries, requests, apologies, suggestions, commands, and offers (Hendrayani et al., 2023), extending beyond mere ornamentation to actively engage the audience. Questions prompt listeners to reflect

and anticipate deeper engagement, fostering sustained interest as audiences momentarily feel directly involved.

Incorporating questions effectively into presentations or talks is not only a valuable skill but also enhances audience engagement and interaction. Educators can employ various pedagogical approaches to help students develop proficiency in using questions in their presentations. One approach is to encourage students to analyze and practice different types of questions, such as open-ended questions, rhetorical questions, and leading questions. By understanding the purposes and effects of each type, students can strategically choose the most appropriate questions to stimulate audience thinking and participation. Additionally, educators can facilitate group discussions or peer evaluations where students can practice formulating and answering questions related to their presentations. This not only enhances students' questioning skills but also fosters collaborative learning and critical thinking. Furthermore, providing constructive feedback on the quality and relevance of students' questions can help them refine their questioning techniques and improve their overall presentation effectiveness.

Other verbal communication strategies, such as quotes, anecdotes, self-experiences, stories, calls for action, analogies and metaphors, startling statements, hopes for a better future, directive address, benefits, and problem-raising, are not as frequently used in TED talks compared to humor and questioning for several reasons. Firstly, the time constraints inherent in TED talks, typically limited to around 18 minutes, necessitate the prioritization of strategies that efficiently convey messages within this timeframe. Humor and questioning excel in capturing and maintaining audience attention, making them preferred choices given the limited time available. Additionally, humor and questioning facilitate active audience engagement, encouraging participation, reflection, and dialogue, which are integral aspects of TED talks known for their dynamic and interactive nature.

Furthermore, humor and questioning are inherently memorable and impactful techniques, evoking emotions, stimulating curiosity, and provoking thought, thereby leaving a lasting impression on the audience. While other strategies like quotes or anecdotes can also be memorable, they may not have the same immediate impact or resonance with the audience. Additionally, the universal appeal and accessibility of humor and questioning contribute to their prominence in TED talks, as they transcend cultural and linguistic barriers, resonating with diverse audiences worldwide. Speaker preference and expertise also play a role,

as some speakers may naturally excel in using humor and questioning effectively, feeling more comfortable and confident employing these strategies in their presentations.

While humor and questioning may dominate the landscape of TED talks, it's essential to recognize the value of teaching a variety of communication strategies to students, encompassing quotes, anecdotes, self-experiences, stories, calls for action, analogies and metaphors, startling statements, hopes for a better future, directive address, benefits, and problem-raising. By incorporating diverse strategies into their presentations, students can develop a versatile skill set that allows them to adapt to different audiences and contexts. Educators can implement pedagogical approaches that encourage students to explore and practice these various strategies, providing opportunities for experimentation, reflection, and refinement. Teaching a breadth of communication techniques not only enhances students' communication skills but also fosters creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability, empowering them to effectively convey their ideas and engage with audiences in meaningful ways. Additionally, exposure to a range of strategies cultivates students' appreciation for the nuances of communication and expands their repertoire of tools for effectively expressing themselves in diverse settings.

### ***The Impact of Nonverbal Communication Strategies in TED Talks***

Nonverbal communication has a vital role in the competency of foreign language communication. (Indah Sekar Pertiwi, & Indriani, 2021). The utilization of non-verbal discourse communicative strategies within the presentation reflects a distinct inclination towards employing verbs, numbers, and size representations, evidently aimed at bolstering clarity and accentuating pivotal points. This inclination resonates with the assertions of Goldin-Meadow (2003), who posits that such strategic utilization can serve to augment the spoken discourse, thereby facilitating enhanced comprehension and lending a sense of weightiness to the conveyed ideas. Nevertheless, the relatively infrequent incorporation of personal pronouns, bodily gestures, and interrogative expressions within the non-verbal realm may suggest a purposeful endeavor to mitigate subjectivity, diminish excessive self-focus, and sustain a narrative flow devoid of overt audience interrogation, as suggested by Kendon (2004). It's noteworthy that gestures, head movements, and synchronized verbal articulation synergistically contribute to crafting a compelling narrative. This observation echoes the findings of

Querol-Julian (2010), underscoring the significance of kinesics and paralinguistic elements as foundational components of genre discourse. Indeed, a speaker's intentional movements, subtle shifts in posture, or nuanced hand gestures have the potential to enhance the delivery of a message, rendering it both overtly explicit and subtly engaging, thus fostering deeper audience engagement and comprehension. Ali et al. (2022) highlighted the utilization of body language for clarifying word meanings, employing visual cues like finger, hand, and arm signals to enhance student understanding. They found that verbs were more effectively learned when accompanied by gestures. Specifically, words encoded with signals were better memorized compared to those learned without gestures, suggesting higher memory retention and increased significance, particularly in terms of imageability.

The analysis of non-verbal discourse communicative strategies in presentations not only provides insights into effective communication techniques but also offers valuable pedagogical implications for communication education. Educators can leverage these findings to design curriculum and instructional activities that cultivate students' proficiency in utilizing diverse communication modalities. For instance, incorporating lessons on the strategic use of verbs, numbers, and size representations can help students understand how to enhance clarity and emphasize key points in their presentations. Moreover, educators can integrate activities that encourage students to practice incorporating personal pronouns, bodily gestures, and interrogative expressions into their communication repertoire, fostering skills in engaging non-verbal communication and audience interaction. By emphasizing the significance of kinesics and paralinguistic elements, instructors can empower students to harness the power of intentional movements, posture adjustments, and hand gestures to enhance the effectiveness of their message delivery.

Many students reported attempting to emulate speakers from TED Talk videos during their own speeches, imitating aspects like pronunciation, body language, intonation, gestures, and eye contact. They also actively practiced these speaking styles during their presentations, particularly when addressing audiences directly (Rohmah, 2022). Tran and Nguyen (2024) found that students experienced improvements in public speaking skills after watching TED Talk videos, including enhancements in body language, eye contact, and speech fluency. Interviews further supported these findings, with participants expressing increased confidence in public speaking abilities after frequently watching

TED Talk videos and familiarizing themselves with various speakers' presentation styles.

Through these pedagogical approaches, students can develop comprehensive communication skills, enabling them to convey ideas persuasively, engage audiences effectively, and achieve communication objectives across various contexts.

### ***Enhancing Public Speaking Instruction through Insights from TED Talk Communication Strategies***

The current study offers valuable insights for educators aiming to enhance public speaking instruction and support EFL learners in mastering oral presentations. By integrating the standard framework derived from TED Talk communication strategies into educational materials, instructors can effectively educate novice presenters on fundamental communication techniques. For instance, incorporating specific TED Talk excerpts or analyses into lesson plans can illustrate key strategies such as storytelling, humor, or audience engagement. According to Mebert et al. (2020), students frequently emphasized the significance of incorporating real-world elements into their coursework, as it enhanced the perceived relevance and relatability of the course content. Teachers ought to clearly illustrate the procedures and tactics for utilizing out-of-class resources for language acquisition, and establish avenues for EFL learners to apply these strategies across various scenarios (Upara & Chusanachoti, 2023). However, when choosing authentic materials, it is essential to consider three key factors: the item's relevance, its appeal, and the suitability of the task and sequence (Erbaggio et al., 2012).

Moreover, the framework established in this study fosters the development of more engaging and persuasive presentations compared to traditional models advocated in public speaking textbooks. Educators can encourage students to emulate TED speakers by practicing techniques like using vivid language, incorporating multimedia elements, or employing persuasive storytelling to captivate audiences. Tran and Nguyen (2024) reported that students utilized TED Talk videos to enhance their public speaking abilities across four dimensions: the objectives behind viewing, prevalent subject matters, how frequently they incorporated the videos, and the duration of time dedicated to them. They noted that watching TED Talks had evolved into a daily routine, contributing to their intellectual growth and serving as a source of rejuvenation. Therefore, acquiring public speaking skills through

the utilization of TED Talks videos involves choosing appropriate topics that resonate with the EFL learners, emulating and rehearsing the techniques employed by the speakers in real public speaking scenarios (Rohmah, 2022).

Instructors are also encouraged to enrich textbook materials with diverse TED Talks and provide opportunities for students to analyze, compare, and evaluate the rhetorical structure of these talks in relation to the standard framework. Assigning tasks that involve critically examining aspects such as structure, delivery, and audience interaction in TED Talks can deepen students' understanding of effective communication strategies. EFL learners can absorb various aspects of language by immersing themselves in the presentations. It's noteworthy that these talks are conducted in English, offering students an opportunity to grasp both the content and language usage firsthand. Through observing the speakers, students can gain valuable insights into the effective utilization of language in presentations (Alghmadi, 2024). When incorporating TED talks into learning, it is emphasized that students are not merely passive listeners as they would be with a recording. Instead, they actively observe the speaker's gestures and facial expressions, allowing them to gather richer information about the speech and integrate it into their own communication skills for future use (Martínez Hernández et al. 2018).

It is crucial to emphasize that the findings of this study should not be seen as prescriptive rules but rather as guiding principles. Communication strategies extracted from TED Talks should not be presented as a rigid formulaic approach. EFL learners need to recognize the unique contexts and purposes that shape the delivery of these talks. Through extensive practice, novice presenters can develop an authentic and nuanced understanding of the genre, enabling them to make rhetorical choices suitable for their individual speech contexts and objectives. By combining these approaches and providing concrete examples and exercises, educators can create a comprehensive learning experience that empowers students to excel in public speaking and oral presentation.

## **Conclusion**

The present study has provided us with a deeper understanding of the verbal and nonverbal strategies employed by TED speakers and their pedagogical potential. The insights gained from these analyses could be of significant pedagogical value in instructing EFL learners to deliver

presentations that are not only suitable for their specific genre and field of study but also compelling and reflective of their individual perspectives. The influence of technology on language classrooms is undeniable, reshaping the methods through which teachers create engaging, personalized, and effective learning environments. Professionals and stakeholders in English Language Teaching are actively exploring this dynamic interaction, seeking to bridge the gap between technology usage and advancements in communication competency. Ivone et al. (2023) emphasize that contemporary educational environments feature a wide range of technological tools and resources, fundamentally altering the landscape of language instruction. Teachers have enthusiastically adopted these digital advancements to effectively involve students, track their development, and improve overall educational achievements.

However, it is important to acknowledge that this study primarily focuses on verbal and nonverbal communication strategies in public speaking, narrowing its scope despite the broader aspects of communicative competence, such as linguistic competence and sociocultural norms. This decision was made based on the significant impact that verbal and nonverbal communication strategies have on audience engagement, message clarity, and persuasive effectiveness in public speaking contexts (Bavelas et al., 1988; Bryant & Zillmann, 1989; Gambrel & Cianci, 2003; Hample, 1980; Martin, 2007; Mehrabian, 1971). Nonetheless, this focus constitutes a limitation, as other components of communication, such as paraverbal strategies, were not explored in this study.

Additionally, the sample size of the current study does not allow for generalizable claims across other types of public speech, which suggests opportunities for future research. Researchers and practitioners working in specific fields could conduct research tailored to particular genres of public speaking, and integrating other speech components such as paraverbal communication strategies may complement and expand the findings of this present study. This will contribute to a more holistic understanding of communication strategies in diverse public speaking contexts.



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