

Evaluating Public Speaking Cues and Persuasiveness through Video Reviews: A Pedagogical Scaffold for ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

While traditional ESL classrooms often focus heavily on grammar and vocabulary rules, real-world communication demands much more than technical accuracy. To bridge this gap, this qualitative study investigated how analyzing public speaking videos can serve as an engaging, hands-on learning tool to help ESL students develop their public speaking and persuasion skills. A total of eight respondents who enrolled in an English for Informative Speeches course were assigned to watch and review different public speaking presentations. Then, the respondents were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to obtain their feedback from the reviews. Through thematic analysis, three major themes emerged, namely: (1) overall delivery of the speaker; (2) speakers' power and persuasiveness; and (3) real world application of public speaking strategies. The findings of the study suggest that video review serves as an effective learning scaffold that helps ESL learners realize how the integration of verbal and non-verbal cues can build speakers' credibility and maintain audiences' engagement. The findings of this study also helped to provide insight on suggesting the meaningful approachable strategies that can be used and applied in real world public speaking. Ultimately, the study shows that using video reviews as a learning scaffold helps students move beyond passive watching to actively mastering the tools of persuasive, real-world communication.

Keywords: Public Speaking, Video Reviews, Persuasive Communication, Verbal and Non-Verbal Cues

INTRODUCTION

English mastery and proficiency are frequently mandated as a prerequisite for English as a Second Language (ESL) students worldwide. To fulfill this requirement, the English teaching and learning processes do not need to be confined solely to traditional "chalk-and-talk" methods. In an increasingly visual and media-rich world, language learning flourishes when connected to contemporary, real-world contexts that challenge students to think critically and creatively. Given the rapidly evolving educational shifts, students should be equipped with knowledge that can benefit them beyond classroom context. Rather than focusing exclusively on language mechanics such as isolated vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammar rules educators must strive to teach students how language functions outside the classroom. To move English education beyond conventional textbook routines and bridge this gap, the evaluation of public speaking cues and persuasive techniques can act as a scaffold to provide an effective framework for teaching language as a tool for authentic persuasion and effective communication, which can facilitate students' ability to use English effectively, in the real-world setting.

It is undeniable that ESL students' English language proficiency can be measured through their ability to master the English mechanics, that are often being dominantly taught in the textbook oriented, orthodox classroom setting (Cainoy et al., 2026; Sasi et al. 2025; Harkio & Pietilä, 2016). However, scholars have been debating on the importance of ensuring that learners can gain more benefits from English, outside of classroom setting, mainly on how English can benefit the learners in the real-world context (Mandart & Rinne, 2026). When it comes to the real-world setting, an ESL learner can primarily stand out from the others when they are able to

demonstrate excellent proficiency in English communication – the ability to present brilliant ideas, deliver clear messages, controlling communication processes and portraying exemplary persuasive skills. Hence, to facilitate and in ensuring ESL students are able to fulfill the real-world demands, it is vital for educators to instill the elements of successful English communication skills, which can be achieved by analyzing effective public speaking cues such as verbal choices, non-verbal behaviors, and persuasive delivery strategies through the available means of persuasion in any given situation. Therefore, using video reviews as a pedagogical scaffold, this article aims to explore the how video reviews can act as a scaffold in teaching successful English communication among ESL learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Video Review Analysis as a Pedagogical Scaffold in ESL Learning

Pedagogical scaffolding serves as a vital instructional support system that enables English as a Second Language (ESL) learners to bridge the gap between passive language comprehension and active communicative output (Abdullah et. Al, 2026). Integrating video-based review tasks into language curricula acts as a multimodal scaffold, offering learners rich contextual cues, authentic speech models, and real-world communication scenarios that traditional textbook-driven instruction often lacks (Park, 2024). Recent studies emphasize that analyzing authentic video content enhances learners' critical observation skills, allowing them to deconstruct complex verbal and non-verbal interactions before producing their own speech. By engaging in systematic video evaluations, ESL students transition from passive observers to reflective evaluators, gaining a deeper awareness of effective discourse structures and functional language usage outside the classroom setting.

The Role of Verbal and Non-Verbal Cues in Public Speaking

Effective public speaking relies on the balanced integration of verbal choices and non-verbal delivery behaviors (Thamrin & Darsih, 2023). Verbal cues such as vocabulary precision, sentence structure, and clarity form the core message, ensuring that abstract or technical ideas remain accessible to diverse audiences. However, recent communication research underlines that non-verbal cues, including sustained eye contact, expressive hand gestures, physical posture, and vocal variety, act as essential dynamic multipliers. When non-verbal behaviors align seamlessly with spoken words, they enhance message clarity, project speaker confidence, and establish strong audience rapport. Conversely, a lack of non-verbal engagement such as monotone delivery or restricted gestures can diminish speaker persuasiveness and alienate listeners, even when the underlying verbal content is factually solid.

Developing Learners' Persuasiveness and Real-World Communication Skills

A central goal of modern ESL instruction is developing real-world communicative competence, where learners move beyond grammatical accuracy to master persuasive influence. Persuasiveness in public speaking requires speakers to establish authority over their topic, evoke appropriate emotional responses, and strategically adapt their language style to match audience needs (Djalolovna, 2025). Contemporary research demonstrates that when ESL learners analyze real-world speakers' persuasive strategies such as storytelling, rhetorical questioning, and clear framing they develop a heightened metacognitive understanding of how language functions as an instrument of influence. Fostering this rhetorical awareness enables learners to internalize actionable strategies, empowering them to deliver structured, approachable, and impactful presentations in academic and professional real-world contexts.

Research Objectives and Questions

This study employed three objectives namely: (1) to explore how ESL students perceive the speakers' credibility through their verbal and non-verbal delivery cues in the video review; (2) to analyze how ESL students evaluate persuasive impact of the speakers' message delivery; and (3) to identify the language styles and rhetorical strategies that ESL students intend to adopt in real world setting.

Accordingly, this study will answer the following research questions:

1. How do ESL students evaluate speakers' credibility based on their verbal choices and non-verbal delivery cues used during public speaking?
2. How do ESL students perceive the effectiveness of speakers' delivery strategies and message content in persuading in audience?
3. What specific language styles and rhetorical strategies do ESL students choose to employ to enhance their own persuasiveness in real-life public speaking situations?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, and this study was conducted to explore how evaluating public speaking cues through video reviews can be applied in teaching English for communication purposes. To achieve the purpose of study, the video reviews are used as a scaffold to teach the students. The participants of this study were purposely selected, in which all participants shared the same education background, whom all of them were the students who enrolled in the course of English for Informative Speeches. The participants of the study were selected among these students as this course mainly taught about how English is used to deliver speeches and public speaking. A total of 8 respondents among the English for Informative Speeches enrollers were selected to be the participants of this study.

Learning Procedure

Before the respondents were interviewed, all of them were given a task to watch a public speaking video. The videos were given by the lecturer, with different topics of discussion from different speaker to each respondent. This step was carried out in order to ensure that the requirements of suitable public speaking video were distributed to the respondents. The distribution of videos with different topics of discussion, delivered by different speakers were done as it was deemed to be interesting to explore different types of reviews from each respondent.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection and data analysis of this study were qualitatively conducted. The data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, which serve as the research instrument for this study. A total of 8 respondents, who priorly completed the video reviewing tasks were interviewed to collect the data. The respondents were interviewed, and the duration of each interview session lasted around 10 – 15 minutes, and each interview session was recorded for note taking purpose. After the data collection process was completed, the data analysis was carried out. The recordings of all interview sessions were first transcribed before the analysis process took place. The transcription of all interviews was then analyzed qualitatively using the thematic analysis. The result of the analysis, the emerging themes and further detailed discussion of the analysis result is presented in the next section of this article.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section presents the results and finding of the study. The data collected from this study was analyzed qualitatively, using thematic analysis. Based on the thematic analysis conducted, it was found that there are three emerging themes namely: (1) overall delivery of the speaker; (2) speaker's power and persuasiveness; and (3) real world application of public speaking strategies.

Overall Delivery of the Speaker

The first theme emerged from the analysis was overall delivery of the speaker. The first emerged theme answered the first research question in which the answers obtained from the respondents during the semi-structured interviews reflect speakers' credibility based on their verbal and non-verbal delivery cues used during public speaking. The respondents agreed that all speakers showed the use of both verbal and non-verbal cues

while delivering their messages in the video. The language styles, as well as the type of non-verbal cues used by each speaker however differ from each other, and the perceived purpose as to why each speakers applied them were reflected from the respondents' feedback. Respondent 2 and Respondent 7 narrated that the speakers utilized easy and clear language, with the absence of difficult vocab, as well as several kinds of non-verbal cues. It is also notable that both respondents agreed that speakers' credibility were reflected through the use of verbal and non-verbal cues that promoted positive nature of presentation.

"I noticed that the speaker used easy, clear, and chatting style language. The speaker did not use too much of academic terms... he used body language, hand gestures to emphasize... the speaker's facial expressions also changed according to the story... also used a variety of vocal notes... the combination of both verbal and non-verbal use by the speaker made me as one of the audiences felt more engaged with the presentation" (R2)

"The speaker avoided using heavy words. The speaker used clear language... the speaker showed the use of body language, appropriate use of hand movements, maintained eye contact with the audience, and speaker's vocal tone is also appropriate... speaker use effective combination of both verbal and non-verbal cues which made the presentation became less boring which managed to build trust from the audience" (R7)

Respondent 3 on the other hand highlighted that due to the heavy topic of discussion, the speaker chose to use easy and simple language, and accompanied with the use of several effective non-verbal cues. The respondent also stated that the speaker used parallel utilization of both verbal and non-verbal cues, which contributed to the speaker's credibility to deliver messages.

"The speaker used simple language and easy to be understood, despite the seriousness of the topic of his speech... word and vocabulary choice by the speaker were not too complex... speaker maintained excellent eye contact and utilized body language... speaker performed several hand gestures and utilization of vocal tone was also appropriate... I think it was effective because both verbal and non-verbal cues utilized by the speaker helped to emphasis on the delivered messages, which were easily understood and accepted by the audiences " (R3)

Respondent 4, Respondent 5, and Respondent 6 shared that the speakers utilized simple and easy vocabulary and word choices to deliver the messages. The non-verbal cues were also used during presentation, and it was highlighted that the speakers' credibility can be identified through the use of both cues, which was reflected through the speakers' demeanor.

"I noticed that the speaker used a lot of understandable vocabulary. The speaker did not use too much high or difficult vocabulary... he used body language, eye contact, facial expressions, and make changes in his vocal tones... yes, they are effective as the way the speaker talked with the audience seemed very confident" (R4)

"The speaker used clear and simple vocabulary... the speaker used good eye contact, hand gesture, facial expressions, and appropriate vocal tone... presentation was effective as the speaker used clear language with the help of eye contact, gestures, and vocal tone, and this made the speaker appear more confident and convincing" (R5)

"I think the speaker's word choices were quite simple and direct... he also used the hand gestures to emphasize some of his important points and his eye contact also helped to create the connection with the audience... it was very effective because most his verbal and non-verbal communication support each other... he did not only sound convincing, but his body language also showed his confidence" (R6)

Respondent 8 demonstrated that the speaker utilized simple and easy vocabulary and several kinds of non-verbal cues. The respondent's feedback also demonstrated the speaker's credibility based of the rapport built between the speaker and the audiences.

"The speaker used simple words and easy vocabulary to explain her ideas... speaker used body language, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and vocal tone during the delivery of her messages... both her use of verbal and non-verbal cues during presentation were effective... It gave positive impacts to audience as it helped

them to stay focused, and able to easily digest the delivered message. These also helped built connection with the audience and left an impression to them” (R8)

Unlike other respondents that reported the speakers’ credibility based on their parallel use of verbal and non-verbal cues, Respondent 1 however presented contradict findings. It was stated that the speaker utilized jargons or high-level vocabulary in delivering messages. The speaker also presented insufficient use of non-verbal cues, resulting in lower credibility and effectiveness of delivery.

“The speaker used formal, scientific vocab since it involved an educational topic. A lot of neuroscience and research related terms were used... because the words are fairly technical, some parts are heavy for general audiences as I believe not everyone can understand scientific terms...his non-verbal cues are not very strong as he kept his left hand in his pocket for about half the video duration. He also blinked quite a lot, and he was slightly slouching. He also kept clearing his throat a few times, and to me he looked a bit sleepy... I do not think his non-verbal cues are very effective, he ended up sharing the message which did not feel as impactful as it could have” (R1)

Based on the feedback from the respondents, it can be understood that in delivering messages, both verbal and non-verbal cues are important to be utilized. A speaker’s delivery credibility and effectiveness can clearly be reflected through the use of language as well as non-verbal cues such as eye contact, body language and gestures, vocal tone and more. It is also important to note that in order to ensure one’s credibility in messages delivery, the utilization of both cues should be parallel. Strong and meaningful messages may not be effectively passed to the audience without sufficient and appropriate use of non-verbal cues to support, emphasize, and stress on the information. Hence, a speaker should not disregard the importance of both elements in order to ensure the credibility of overall speech delivery.

Speaker’s Power and Persuasiveness

The following emerged theme in this study is speaker’s power and persuasiveness. This theme discussed about speakers’ power and authority over their delivery as well as the persuasive skills portrayed by the speakers during their delivery. This specific theme provides findings that answered the second research question which is about zooming the lens regarding the persuasive aspect of a speech. This theme also highlighted how do the respondents perceived the importance of language as a component of message delivery, which helped to provide more insights regarding the appeal of English mastery beyond classroom benefits. Respondent 2 and Respondent 6 stated that they can identify the speakers’ power and persuasiveness through their language styles. The respondents also strongly agreed that language is an important element to be used in ensuring the success of messages delivery, as language is the means of communicating information and shaping others’ emotions, thoughts, and actions.

“The speaker’s language styles showed his persuasiveness as they influenced the way audiences look into a certain matter..., I strongly agree that language is a very powerful tool for delivering messages to others. Language did not only allow information exchange but can also influence one’s way of thinking and it also has the ability to evoke one’s emotion... language can be considered as a powerful tool because it enable people to build connection, express their emotions, and influence people’s thoughts” (R2)

“I think his language style showed his credibility because he sounded very knowledgeable, but at the same time he did not try to use complicated words to make himself sound intelligent... I also feel persuaded by this speaker... I think language is the most powerful tool because the way we choose and use our words can affect how people understand and react to our messages. So, for me language is powerful because it can help us to explain the ideas, to influence people’s opinion and make people think about something” (R6)

Respondent 3, Respondent 4, and Respondent 7 demonstrated their agreement on speakers’ power and persuasive elements in delivering messages throughout their presentation. These respondents also highlighted on importance of language as tool of communication by giving clear example of how the speakers presentation showed the power of language.

“Yes, the speaker’s language style demonstrated his power and persuasiveness... the speaker portrayed excellent power over the topic and excellent persuasive skills through his credible use of persuasion... Yes, I think language is a very powerful tool that can be used to deliver messages as one’s language use can influence other people’s emotions and their way of thinking. In this video, the speaker’s language style made the audiences rethink about the way we communicate and connect to other people” (R3)

“I think I am persuaded by the speaker and the messages he delivered because the way he spoke was kind of influencing his audiences... I think without language, no messages will be able to be delivered, that is why language is a very important tool... language also can influence how people think and feel about the messages that they received” (R4)

“The speaker’s language style showed balance authority over the topic mastery, and I think the speaker showed good persuasive skills... Yes, because language shapes one’s perception and action. For example, through the use of language, the speaker managed to turn the abstract advice about financial issues into a practical way that can directly be practiced by the audience” (R7)

Respondent 5 and Respondent 8 agreed that the speakers’ language styles reflected their power and persuasiveness in delivering the messages. The respondents also believed on the importance of language as a powerful tool of communication, as language can influence one’s emotions, thoughts, perceptions, and actions.

“The speakers’ language styles reflect his power and persuasiveness... His appropriate choice of words also helped the audience to show his authority over the topic, which helped to persuade the audience to accept the speaker’s messages... language is a powerful tool because it allows people to express ideas, opinions, and emotions clearly, as well as can influence how audience understand and respond to the messages” (R5)

“Her language style helped to present her as someone friendly, good at maintaining good connection with her audiences. These helped to show her power and control over the presentation as well as her persuasiveness... I think language is a powerful tool to deliver messages to others as the way one’s use of language can influence how people feel, think, and understand about the message, as well as how they respond to the perceived messages ” (R8)

Respondent 1 provided a slightly contradicting response compared to the other respondents. Respondent 1 stated that it was noticeable that the speaker’s power and persuasiveness were reduced due to the imbalance use of verbal and non-verbal language styles. The respondent also stressed that verbal language is the main element used in delivering messages, and that words alone can shape people’s views.

“On the language side, he was persuasive which is reflected in the use of his formal and scientific language, but as I said, the persuasiveness was weakened by his flat delivery. But yes, I believe the choice of his language actually gave him the credibility however the delivery was not so persuasive...I think language is a very powerful tool because even if the speaker’s delivery was not as perfect or smooth as it should be the words that the speaker chose can still shape how the audiences understood and trust the messages that were delivered” (R1)

The respondents’ feedback showed that from the reviewed public speaking videos, it was clear that a successful delivery should portray speakers’ power and persuasiveness, as the inclusion of these elements can ensure successful acceptance of messages among the audiences. It is also important to be stressed that, in delivering messages, successful language use should be applied as through language, various successful communication goals such as exchanging information, evoking emotion, building perception, influencing thoughts, and more can be achieved.

Real World Application of Public Speaking Strategies

The fourth emerged theme of the study is real world application of public speaking strategies. This theme answered the third research question of the study, which focused on exploring the possible strategies that the respondents will choose to apply in real world setting, specifically if they are required to perform their own

successful public speaking in the future. This theme also demonstrated the overall understanding of the respondents, on what elements are required to be applied in the process of delivering messages, in order for the process to be considered a successful one. Respondent 1 and Respondent 5 stated they prefer to use clear, easy, confident, and convincing language in delivering messages. The help of non-verbal cues such as eye contact, body language, and vocal tones were also deemed as important to be included while delivering speeches.

“I would try to use clear and confident language, but in persuasive and natural way which means not too stiff and overly serious, with appropriate use of vocal notes... I feel like the more serious the topic that I want to deliver, the friendlier and more approachable I need to sound so my audience will stay engaged instead of feeling distant” (R1)

“I will use clear, confident, and formal language... I will choose strong and appropriate words while avoid using unnecessary, complicated vocabulary... I would also combine the use of language with good eye contact, gesture, and vocal tone variations to make the presentation become more convincing and engaging... I believe all these elements can help to show my power and persuasiveness” (R5)

Respondent 2, Respondent 6, and Respondent 7 on the other hand presented interesting and notable feedback regarding the strategies to be used for successful public speaking. These respondents agreed that non-verbal cues such as eye contact, body language, and vocal tone should be utilized together with verbal cues during delivery. They also agreed that the use of clear, easy, and convincing language is important to be used compared to difficult or complex language. Interestingly, these respondents also stressed on specific use of verbal language style that are deemed impactful to be included in successful public speaking, such as using real life situations or experiences as example, application of questions, and application of storytelling concept to help support their delivery.

“I will use clear, easy, and convincing language so that the audiences can get the messages that I intent to deliver. I will try to avoid too much use of difficult vocabulary as it may hinder the audiences’ ability to understand... I will also apply the storytelling concept while sharing my own experiences to support my messages... the appropriate vocal notes, gestures, and body movements that can attract audiences’ attention will also be used... this will ensure the effectiveness of speaker’s credibility, persuasiveness, and smooth message delivery” (R2)

“I will probably use the language style that is clear, confident, and easy to understand for my audience and I will also try to use some examples for my audience that can relate to the speech... I will also be asking some questions to make them think and stay engaged... I will also maintain the eye contact with the audience because it is important... I think this can enhance my persuasive skills” (R6)

“I will opt to use structured language to deliver my messages, and maybe include some storytelling style of message delivery, including some real-world scenarios in explaining my points and asking the audience some questions to engage with them during the speech... I also think that maintaining eye contact with the audience and proper utilization of body language can help me to persuade my audience more effectively” (R7)

Respondent 3 on the other hand highlighted the use of verbal language should be utilized with specific purpose such as to influence or evoke audiences’ emotions and thoughts, together with the use of non-verbal cues to enhance speaker’s persuasiveness.

“The language that I will use will influence the audiences’ emotions and way of thinking, and with the help of body language and gestures... I think the use of non-verbal alongside the verbal cues are important to show my persuasive skills” (R3)

Respondent 4 also highlighted that specific use of non-verbal cues can benefit the speaker. The respondent also shared interesting strategy to use verbal language, in which it was shared the suitability of language selection should depend on the nature and setting of the speech.

“I think I will be utilizing mainly informal language during public speaking if given the choices, however

during the formal setting, I will be using the formal language. I will focus on the choice of language to be used during the speech. In terms of non-verbal cues, I think I will mainly maintain the eye contact with the audiences in order to appear more persuasive towards the audiences” (R4)

Likewise, Respondent 8 also highlighted that the use of speaker’s verbal language should reflect the speaker’s own personality and preference, to lessen the pressure of message delivery. The respondent also believed appropriate non-verbal cues should also be able to help the speaker to appear credible and persuasive.

“I think I will use gestures while explaining such as the hand movements. I will also use the facial expressions when explaining, for example if I am explaining about something sad, I will show the emotions through my facial expressions so that the audiences can dive into my speech better... In terms of the verbal aspects, I will opt to use simple language because it is comfortable for me which will me to be able to explain my points easily to the audience. I believe I will have the power over my presentation and help *me to become more persuasive*” (R8)

The respondents’ feedback illustrated that successful message delivery will reflect the power and persuasiveness of a speaker. It was also illustrated that the use of appropriate and suitable verbal and non-verbal cues can ensure successful message delivery, which can also enhance speakers’ power and persuasiveness. From the extensive feedback obtained from the respondents, it can be summarized that the respondents are aware of what elements of verbal, non-verbal cues that should be included, and how these elements can contribute to promote speakers’ power and persuasiveness. The respondents’ feedback also portrayed the understanding regarding the importance of language, its styles, and its roles, specifically in building excellent identity of a speaker. The respondents also showed profound responses regarding their preferred strategies, including the styles of verbal and non-verbal cues that will be used, that were deemed the most suitable to be used to ensure successful message delivery. This shows that from the video reviews, the respondents were able to equip themselves with knowledge on how and what needs to be done to carry out successful message deliver. The equipped knowledge obtained by the respondents will facilitate students to apply the learnt elements to be applied in real world situations, for future public speaking use.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of moving ESL instruction beyond traditional textbook grammar routines to focus on functional, real-world communication skills. By using video review tasks as an interactive pedagogical scaffold, students gained a deeper appreciation for how verbal precision and non-verbal delivery interact to build speaker credibility and audience trust. The findings reveal that while well-structured, clear vocabulary provides a solid foundation, non-verbal cues—such as eye contact, purposeful body movement, and expressive vocal modulation—are essential dynamic multipliers that turn basic information sharing into a compelling, persuasive speech.

When students analyzed real-world public speaking examples, they developed a clearer understanding of how language functions as a tool for authentic persuasion, shaping listener perceptions, evoking emotion, and driving action. Most importantly, this video-based scaffolding strategy prompted students to reflect on their own public speaking goals. Rather than relying on rigid, overly formal presentations, students expressed a strong desire to adopt approachable, highly engaging communication techniques—such as storytelling, relatable examples, rhetorical questions, and expressive non-verbal delivery—in real-world settings. Ultimately, integrating multimodal video reviews empowers ESL educators to nurture confident, persuasive communicators who are well-prepared to succeed beyond the classroom.

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