Communicate to Captivate: Integrating Discourse Competence Elements in ESL Academic Presentations

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic single-case study examines the manifestations of discourse competence among 15 ESL learners during oral essay map presentations in a blended English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at a Malaysian public university. This case study aims to illuminate how aspects of discourse competence are demonstrated and integrated within a specific blended learning environment within a defined setting and a limited group of participants. Applying template analysis on observational and semi-structured interview data from fifteen participants, and grounded in Januin and Stephen's (2015) framework, the study delineates five fundamental components: public speaking proficiency (including paralinguistic strategies and question-handling effectiveness), adaptation of written organizational structures to oral formats, interactive and interactional metadiscourse (comprising transitions, frame markers, boosters, and stance markers), metalinguistic awareness (through public speaking and essay-specific terminology), and technological integration (employing audio-visual aids such as Canva and Prezi).

The analysis clarifies how students strategically organise these components to create textual coherence, cohesion, and audience engagement, thereby enhancing existing models by integrating multimodal digital literacies as essential aspects of discourse competence. Examples of this type of language include interactive metadiscourse, which helps things move forward (such as "however" and "first"), and interactional markers that convey someone's feelings about something (like "You will look good too"). Audio-visual aids served as navigational "road signs," reducing confusion and demonstrating the rhetorical effectiveness of technology.

These empirical findings align with fundamental paradigms of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995), highlighting the advancement of discourse competence in technology-mediated educational environments. The results support the need for a clear EAP curriculum that systematically incorporates these skills to enhance persuasive academic communication, particularly for non-native speakers learning to utilise various types of media. Additionally, the pedagogical frameworks utilised in blended learning contexts introduce further complexities, necessitating a re-evaluation of traditional methods to improve academic discourse competence among these varied student populations (Januin & McLellan, 2016; Januin et al., 2023).

Keywords: Discourse competence, Metadiscourse, Technology integration, Academic Presentation, Metalanguage

INTRODUCTION

For ESL students enrolled in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, cultivating proficiency in academic reading and writing is imperative. These courses aim to equip students with the essential skills to accomplish university-level academic assignments. These tasks encompass reading academic articles and textbooks, as well as creating extensive written works, including essays and research assignments. The writing conventions and practices at the primary and secondary school levels, with which students are familiar, often differ from those at the university level. University writing practices and

discourse require a thorough understanding of discipline-specific rhetorical strategies, genre conventions, and citation practices, all of which contribute to the authoritative voice expected in scholarly communication.

This advanced literacy poses significant challenges for non-native English speakers due to the complexities required for mastering academic genres, which encompass logical structure, specific terms, intricate syntax, and proper citation methods (Li et al., 2023). Additionally, subtle pragmatic features, such as hedging and boosting, are often overlooked by non-native English-speaking scholars, even in their native languages, thereby complicating their ability to effectively position their arguments within academic discourse (Smirnova, 2015). This frequently arises from challenges in understanding the subtle distinctions between textual structures in their native languages and the target academic English, which requires a specialised discourse with distinct rules and organisational conventions that differ across disciplines and genres (Januin & Stephen, 2015). This complex landscape necessitates specialised teaching methods that prioritise both language skills and discourse competence, encompassing not only grammatical accuracy but also the strategic deployment of rhetorical elements (Januin & McLellan, 2016). This is particularly crucial, considering the rising prevalence of non-native English-speaking scholars publishing in English, which underscores the global necessity for proficient academic communication (Medina, 2022). The transition to higher education often introduces students to academic registers and language proficiencies for the first time, highlighting a substantial gap in their previous educational experiences (Medina, 2022).

This research employs an ethnographic single case study methodology to navigate the complex landscape and distinct problems presented by blended learning environments. This methodological selection enables a thorough, context-specific examination of the discourse competence components exhibited by a particular group of ESL learners, yielding detailed, descriptive insights into their academic communication practices (Baškarada, 2014; Njie & Asimiran, 2014). This method is suitable for investigating complex phenomena within their real-world context, particularly when the distinctions between the phenomenon and its setting are not clearly defined. Furthermore, the pedagogical frameworks employed in blended learning environments introduce additional complexities, necessitating a reassessment of conventional approaches to enhancing academic discourse competence among these diverse student populations (Januin & McLellan, 2016; Januin et al., 2023). This extensive challenge can hinder learners' ability to distinguish between the structural patterns of lengthy texts in their native languages and those in the target language (Januin & McLellan, 2016). The complexity is intensified by the restricted linguistic and rhetorical resources typically available to non-native English writers, resulting in difficulties such as the inappropriate or excessive application of specific discourse markers (Kostareva & Utkina, 2022). These challenges underscore the importance of developing strong discourse competence, which encompasses linguistic precision, effective argument structure, appropriate rhetorical strategies, adherence to academic writing genre conventions (Yu-min & Xie, 2022), and proficiency in delivering academic presentations. International students must master time management and various content platforms while improving digital literacy, as educators seek to sustain engagement in the absence of immediate face-to-face interaction (Wei et al., 2024). This complex challenge is exacerbated by cultural disparities in academic expectations, as students from teacher-centred systems, such as those common in China, frequently demonstrate a lack of experience in critical thinking and the development of independent analytical skills (Wei et al., 2024). These students often encounter challenges with source-based, critical, and writer-responsible writing, as well as difficulties in academic discourse socialisation, despite generally possessing robust digital literacy skills (Wette & Furneaux, 2018; Wei et al., 2024).

These discrepancies highlight the crucial need for explicit instruction in argumentation, critical thinking, and advanced academic literacy practices, particularly in blended learning contexts (Osman & Januin, 2021). This extensive challenge can impair learners' ability to distinguish between the structural patterns of lengthy texts in their native languages and those in the target language. This necessitates the formulation of sophisticated linguistic and rhetorical techniques to articulate their perspectives, reasoning, and concepts persuasively and coherently (Osman & Januin, 2021). This challenge is particularly pronounced for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, where rhetorical patterns may differ significantly from those commonly found in English academic discourse (Islamiyah & Fajri, 2020). This is particularly apparent in persuasive writing, where students frequently encounter difficulties in formulating compelling arguments, analysing and critiquing assertions, and supplying empirical evidence to substantiate their rationales (Osman, 2021; Liao & Liao, 2022). This challenge frequently arises from insufficient exposure to a broad vocabulary and essential critical

reading techniques necessary for comprehending intricate academic texts and effectively synthesising information (Khoo & Huo, 2022).

The difficulty is frequently associated with their struggle to comprehend the structural differences between extended texts in their native language and the target academic language (Bruce, 2008a). Academic and professional discourses are specialised modes of communication regulated by specific conventions and organisational principles (Morell, 2015). Students encounter intricate academic settings characterised by sophisticated vocabulary and discourse knowledge that may be unfamiliar (Vance, 2005, 2007). Enhancing discourse competence at the tertiary level poses significant challenges for ESL learners who possess limited experience in composing extensive, structured texts. Additionally, numerous EAP courses incorporate oral presentation assignments, thereby complicating learners' endeavours to develop discourse competence in both written and spoken academic contexts. Thus, the attainment of discourse competence across these diverse modalities is a primary goal for English for Academic Purposes and English for Specific Purposes programs, which seek to prepare students with the requisite skills for addressing the challenges of higher education (Januin & Stephen, 2015). This encompasses not only mastering the intricate rhetorical structure necessary for academic genres but also cultivating the capacity to critically articulate their findings, a skill essential for knowledge dissemination via academic presentation. This encompasses the ability to formulate arguments effectively, maintain coherence and unity in writing, and deliver persuasive conclusions (Khammee et al., 2024). This complex need for effective communication highlights the importance of explicit instruction in rhetorical conventions and genre awareness, particularly for non-native English speakers who often struggle to establish an authoritative research identity in academic settings (Blazer & DeCapua, 2020).

In the examined EAP course, students participate in reading, writing, and orally presenting their essay structures. This supplementary task amplifies the intricacy of their academic endeavours. Every participant must fulfil three interconnected components: creating an essay map, presenting the essay map orally, and composing the final essay draft. Therefore, students must demonstrate proficiency in both academic writing and oral presentation, incorporating discourse competence in these modalities. This holistic method requires a profound comprehension of academic discourse to seamlessly shift between written argumentation and verbal expression, guaranteeing that the conveyed ideas retain coherence and persuasive efficacy across formats (Łubiarz & Kościńska, 2024).

Understanding Discourse Competence

This section provides a brief explanation regarding discourse competence. The concept derives from the overarching theory of communicative competence, which is included in all frameworks that delineate language competence. The concept of communicative competence, encompassing multiple dimensions, was initially proposed by Hymes (1972) in response to Chomsky's (1965) differentiation between competence and performance. Hymes contended that Chomsky's emphasis on linguistic competence neglects crucial socio-cultural aspects of communication. Hymes defined communicative competence as the understanding of linguistic rules and the capacity to apply this knowledge suitably in various contexts. He delineated four fundamental aspects:

i) The formal potential of an utterance;

ii) the feasibility of generating an utterance given the available resources;

iii) the appropriateness of an utterance in relation to the communicative context;

iv) The actual execution of the utterance and its consequences (Hymes, 1972).

Consequently, communicative competence encompasses both linguistic knowledge and socio-cultural awareness. Building upon this, Canale and Swain (1980) introduced a framework consisting of three elements: grammatical competence pertains to the mastery of linguistic rules; sociolinguistic competence relates to the appropriate application of language in social contexts; strategic competence encompasses communication strategies employed to surmount challenges or enhance efficacy (Canale, 1983).

Canale (1983) underscored communicative competence as the capacity to integrate grammatical structures and meanings to produce coherent spoken or written texts across various genres. This expansion specifically guides the formulation of language curricula centred on practical communication. Discourse competence constitutes an essential component of students' skills in academic reading and writing, frequently presenting difficulties for ESL learners.

Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995) significantly incorporated discourse competence into their pedagogical model of communicative competence, alongside linguistic, sociolinguistic, strategic, and actional competences. This model diverges marginally from Canale's by prioritising discourse competence as its primary emphasis. In a later model, Celce-Murcia (1995) expanded on discourse competence, placing greater emphasis on formulaic language and paralinguistic features.

Discourse competence entails the ability to identify and generate extended spoken or written language characterised by coherence and cohesion (Januin & Stephen, 2015, p. 167). Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) identify five components: cohesion, deixis, coherence, generic structure, and characteristics of conversational turn-taking. Similar to Canale's methodology, the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) incorporates discourse competence within pragmatic competence, defining it as: "…the ability of a user/learner to arrange sentences effectively to produce coherent stretches of language," taking into account factors such as topic focus, information sequencing (given/new, temporal, cause/effect), discourse management, style, register, and rhetorical effect (CEFR, 2001, p. 123).

Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan (2006) developed a model of communicative competence for writing, influenced by Hymes (1972), emphasising discourse competence as essential for effective written communication. They contended that cultivating discourse competence fosters the utilisation of linguistic, pragmatic, strategic, and intercultural skills, allowing writers to appropriately employ features such as cohesion, coherence, and genre knowledge in social and contextual environments (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).

Bhatia (2004) expanded the concept by introducing discursive competence, which encompasses: textual competence: proficiency in linguistic codes and contextual knowledge for suitable text creation; generic competence: adeptness in managing recurring rhetorical situations through conventions associated with professional and disciplinary cultures; social competence: proficient language use across diverse social and institutional contexts to articulate identity and manoeuvre social constraints (Bhatia, 2004, pp. 144-145).

This comprehensive viewpoint encompasses not only linguistic proficiency but also contextual and cultural suitability, closely associating discourse competence with genre theory. Bruce (2008a) defined discourse competence as the capacity to integrate diverse forms of knowledge to generate linguistically precise and socially suitable academic texts. He established a genre-based framework, delineating three categories of knowledge: social genre (socially acknowledged text types), cognitive genre (the comprehension of the mental organisation of these texts), and linguistic knowledge (the language systems engaged during text production) (Bruce, 2006, 2008b). This framework accurately delineates the intricate knowledge requirements of academic writing and is also applicable to associated academic tasks, such as English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) presentations.

This section emphasises discourse competence as the ability to utilise different types of knowledge necessary for comprehending and generating extended texts, which is crucial for overcoming the challenges learners encounter in academic tasks.

Knowledge of Academic Oral Presentations

This section provides a concise overview of prior research on the types of knowledge used in academic oral presentations. Numerous scholars characterise academic oral presentations as necessitating various fundamental skills (Andeweg, de Jong, & Hoeken, 1998; Bankowski, 2010; Collins, 2004; De Grez, Valcke, & Roozen, 2009a, 2009b; Hill & Storey, 2003; Kerby & Romine, 2009). De Grez et al. (2009a) developed a multimedia instructional method based on social cognitive theory and self-regulated learning principles (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2001), which significantly enhanced students' oral presentation skills compared to

conventional techniques. Despite offering nine assessment criteria for oral presentations—encompassing delivery factors such as eye contact, vocal delivery, enthusiasm, audience engagement, and body language, as well as content components including introduction, structure, and conclusion—they failed to delineate the specific information requirements for academic presentations.

Hill and Storey (2003) investigated an online course that employed interactive websites to improve oral presentation skills. Their study emphasised the significance of preparing for oral presentations, organisation, utilisation of visual aids, and delivery, yet it failed to delineate the specific knowledge components necessary. Conversely, extensive academic research has focused on specific aspects of discourse competence, particularly in academic writing, conceptualising it as a complex construct that encompasses linguistic and socio-cognitive genre knowledge (Januin & McLellan, 2016; Januin & Stephen, 2015). Nonetheless, the implementation of this intricate framework in academic oral presentations remains inadequately examined, despite its increasing significance in higher education. Kaur and Ali (2017). Academic oral presentations require a unique amalgamation of linguistic, pragmatic, strategic, and intercultural skills, making them a formidable rhetorical challenge, especially for non-native English-speaking students (Kaur & Ali, 2017; Uztosun, 2024). Conversely, other research emphasises the discourse and linguistic elements utilised by students in academic oral presentations (Morell, 2015; Zareva, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013). Zareva (2013) discovered that students generally favour utilising familiar written academic genres to inform their oral presentations, thereby reflecting their academic identities. Zareva (2009, 2011) conducted a linguistic analysis of adverbial expressions in student presentations to illustrate how these linguistic elements enhance discourse coherence and aid listeners' comprehension of the speakers' arguments. Subsequent research demonstrates that selecting a suitable corpus and pedagogical tasks, which consider learners' subjectivity in establishing rhetorical and pragmatic standards, is crucial for creating effective web-based oral presentation materials, particularly for individuals seeking to engage with a global community (Huang & Chang, 2015). Additional research has investigated rhetorical strategies in undergraduate oral presentations, focusing on patterns that enhance discourse structure and effectiveness, beyond mere lexical features (Ducasse & Brown, 2023). This underscores the necessity of examining the linguistic characteristics that manifest these rhetorical manoeuvres, especially for English as a Second Language learners, who encounter considerable difficulties in mastering the requisite vocabulary, conventional phrases, and rhetorical techniques vital for proficient academic oral presentations due to the absence of explicit language directives (Fauzanna et al., 2024; Kaur & Ali, 2017; Uztosun, 2024).

Januin and Stephen (2015) investigated discourse competence in academic presentations by analysing course documents, observing students' oral presentations, and conducting interviews with teachers regarding their expectations for student performances. They performed an ethnographic study that encompassed document analysis and observations of student presentations in a Malaysian blended English for Academic Purposes course. Their textographic methodology (Paltridge, 2008; Swales, 2013), examined through template analysis (King, 1998, 2004), indicated that three elements of discourse competence support oral essay map presentations: public speaking abilities, organisation of presentation structure, and linguistic awareness. These categories offer a valuable framework for evaluating students' discourse competence in academic presentations. Nonetheless, their findings underscored the necessity for more detailed specifications of the linguistic characteristics and rhetorical techniques that comprise these elements, especially for English as a Second Language learners (Osman & Januin, 2021). Detailed specifications are essential, as English language learners frequently encounter considerable difficulties in mastering the requisite vocabulary, common expressions, and correspondence skills vital for proficient academic and professional communication (Fauzanna et al., 2024). The lack of specific linguistic guidance on rhetorical strategies is further intensified by students' tendency to transfer structures from written academic genres to their oral presentations (Januin & Stephen, 2015). These "considerable difficulties" are direct manifestations of their linguistic limitations in applying advanced academic English in oral contexts. This highlights the necessity for clear instruction on the rhetorical and linguistic modifications required for successful academic oral presentations, going beyond the simple application of written genre conventions (Osman & Januin, 2021).

This summary indicates that academic oral presentations necessitate competencies and understanding encompassing delivery style, content organisation, discourse knowledge, and linguistic proficiency.

Research Question

This study seeks to answer the following question:

"Which elements of discourse competence knowledge are displayed in students' oral project presentations?"

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a single-case ethnographic design to navigate the complex landscape and distinct problems presented by blended learning environments. This methodological selection enables a thorough, context-specific examination of the discourse competence components exhibited by a particular group of ESL learners, yielding detailed, descriptive insights into their academic communication practices. This method is suitable for investigating complex phenomena within their real-world context, particularly when the distinctions between the phenomenon and its setting are not clearly defined (Baškarada, 2014; Njie & Asimiran, 2014).

This research forms part of a larger ongoing project that examines discourse competence in ESL learners enrolled in a blended English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at a public university in Sabah, Malaysia. This ethnographic case study employs qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and systematic observations of students' essay map presentations, to elucidate the complex realities of communicative practices within this specific setting (Alqahtani et al., 2019; Jones-Hooker & Tyndall, 2023).

In the course, before submitting their final essays, students are required to prepare an essay map and present it orally to their teacher and classmates, with each presentation lasting between 15 and 20 minutes. A purposive sample of fifteen students volunteered to participate, and they were observed and recorded during their oral presentations. Deep immersion could be achieved by concentrating on this group from a single EAP course, which also enabled the collection of extensive data required for ethnographic research through observations, followed by 20–30-minute interviews. This method, which focused on a small, targeted cohort, produced rich data about the different types of discourse knowledge they displayed, something that would be challenging to accomplish with a larger, more dispersed sample (Fusch et al., 2017). This method, which focused on a small, targeted cohort, produced rich data about the different types of discourse knowledge they displayed, something that would be challenging to accomplish with a larger, more dispersed sample (Fusch et al., 2017). Both observation and interview data were examined using template analysis (King, 1998, 2004).

The discourse competence knowledge framework originally proposed by Januin and Stephen (2015) was selected as the analytical template a priori for this study, as their research had identified relevant discourse competence elements within similar academic presentation contexts. This analytical lens, also known as 'a priori', in template analysis, provides a foundation for exploring how rhetorical moves within these presentations contribute to overall coherence and listener comprehensibility, particularly when considering the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the student participants (Ducasse & Brown, 2023). This methodological choice facilitates a robust investigation into how students integrate public speaking skills, written structural organisation, and linguistic knowledge during their oral academic presentations (Januin & Stephen, 2015).

Findings

The findings in this study are guided by the research question to uncover the elements of discourse competence exhibited in the students' oral presentations of their essay maps. We relied on two types of data: interview and observational data to identify the highest-order codes or themes of the analysis.

Based on the results, the discourse knowledge exhibited in the students' oral presentation of the essay map encompasses an amalgamation of knowledge, including public speaking knowledge, the use of an organisational framework in oral presentation, and linguistic knowledge. Public speaking knowledge encompasses three sub-elements: paralinguistic strategies, the use of audio-visual aids, and the effective handling of questions. The second category concerns the textual structure of the essay map presentation.

Linguistic knowledge is another dimension of discourse competence in an oral presentation, which includes incorporating coherent devices and effective word choices as an attempt to create a coherent and persuasive oral presentation of the essay map.

The five types of discourse competence, as identified in our observation and interview analyses, are crucial for crafting decent-quality essay map presentations. The types of discourse competence in this study are moderately consistent with past literature. We present each discourse competence knowledge element in two tabular forms, based on the data types and extracts, for brevity. A brief discussion will follow the tables to highlight the association between the findings and the previous literature.

Table 1A: Summary findings (Observation data)

Higher- order codes	**Sub-categories**	**Data types**	**Examples from data extracts**
Public Speaking Knowledge	Applying Paralinguistic strategies (voice projection; eye contact; body gestures; facial expressions) Handling questions	Observation template based on Januin & Stephen (2015)	All participants displayed wide ranges of these paralinguistic strategies: assorted voice projections, both confident and hesitant eye-contacts, both useful and unconvincing body gestures and facial expressions. Seven out of 15 students were asked questions after their presentations. However, only four students were able to handle questions effectively.
Utilising Written Organisation Structure	Use of Written Structure into Oral Presentation	Observation template based on Januin & Stephen (2015)	From our observation template of the 15 students' essay map presentations, only one format of presentation organisation was employed. The presentation format has six fragments: salutation, introduction, title introduction, essay map, closing, and questions & answer segments.
Employing Metadiscourse	Incorporated Hyland 'Interactive Metadiscourse' to guide listeners through the presentation.	Observation template based on Januin & Stephen (2015)	Lexical cohesive devices: '*You,' 'I,' 'They'* (Existential Reference) *'This,' 'These,' 'That'* (Demonstrative Reference) *'and', 'Furthermore', 'In addition'* (Additive Conjunction) *'Though,' 'But,' 'However'* (Adversative Conjunction)
	Incorporated Hyland's 'Interactional Metadiscourse' to express one's stance, engagement, and	Observation template based on Januin & Stephen (2015)	An example to **persuade**: '*Strength training for at least two days of the week can combat this and help you maintain weight loss. You will look good too*.'

	attitude		An example to **argue**: '*The first reason of flood occurrence in Penampang is due to the overflowing Babagon dam. Why I said this. This is because the Babagon dam obviously failed to mitigate the effect of heavy rain and prevent flash flood engulfing low-lying areas in Penampang due to heavy rainfall.*'
Using public speaking & essay metalanguage		Observation template based on Januin & Stephen (2015)	Examples of public speaking metalanguage: *'Hello,'* *'Thanks for listening,'* *'I will present…',* *'My topic is about…..*' Examples of essay metalanguage: *'This is my introduction.', 'This is my thesis statement.', 'My first topic sentence is…', 'These are my controlling ideas.'. 'My examples are….*'.
Technology Integration	Using audio-visual aids	Observation template based on Januin & Stephen (2015)	The Use of presentation applications such as Microsoft PowerPoint, Powtoon, Canva & Google Slides among the 15 students: 8 students used Canva 2 students used Powtoon 2 students used PowerPoint 3 students used Google Slides

Table 1B: Summary findings (Interview data)

Higher-order codes	**Sub-categories**	**Data types**	**Examples from interview extracts**
Public Speaking Knowledge	Applying paralinguistic strategies (voice projection; eye contact; body gestures; facial expression) Handling questions	Interview data based on interview questions in Januin & Stephen (2015)	'*Although this is just an essay presentation, our voice must be clear.*' (S7) -Voice projection '*Yes, looking at the audience is very very important.*' (S10) – Eye contact '*When I hear people speaking in front, I want to see how they say it with their face.*' (S3) – Voice projection & Facial expression '*Oh yes, I am scared when I have to answer questions but no choice. I still have to answer.*' (S2) '*Why we ask questions because we want the speaker to*

			make things clear. So when people ask, we try to answer.' (S3)
Utilising Written Organisation Structure	Use of Written Structure into Oral Presentation	Interview data based on interview questions in Januin & Stephen (2015)	'*We stick to the essay map to present. It is easier for us.*' (S5) '*It is much easier to present using the essay map structure. Easy for others to follow.*' (S9)
Employing Metadiscourse	Incorporated Hyland 'Interactive Metadiscourse' to guide listeners through the presentation.	Interview data based on interview questions in Januin & Stephen (2015)	Students reported using 'transitions' like **however, therefore, in addition,** to indicate transitions (interactive metadiscourse). *'I started by explaining the main concept, and then I said,* ***however, there's a different view we should also consider,*** *to show possibilities.' (S3)* *'I used* ***in addition*** *to link my second point, so it doesn't feel too abrupt.' (S9)* Students reported using 'frame markers' like **first, next, finally, to conclude, in this section,** to signal the stages or the structure of discourse. *'I used* ***First*** *to introduce the background, then I moved on to the findings. I used* ***to conclude*** *when I want to summarise or conclude my points and presentation.' (S5)* *'I like to say things like* ***'in this part of my presentation'*** *just so people know where we are.' (S2)*
Employing Metadiscourse	Incorporated Hyland's 'Interactional Metadiscourse' to express one's stance, engagement, and attitude		An example to **persuade**: '*Strength training for at least two days of the week can combat this and help you maintain weight loss. You will look good too*.' An example to **argue**: '*The first reason of flood occurrence in Penampang is due to the overflowing Babagon dam. Why I said this. This is because the Babagon dam obviously failed to mitigate the effect of heavy rain and prevent flash flood engulfing low-lying areas in Penampang due to heavy rainfall.*'
Using Metalanguage	Employing Public Speaking and Essay Metalanguage Essay		Examples of public speaking metalanguage: *'Hello,'* *'Thanks for listening,'* *'I will present…',* *'My topic is about…..*' Examples of essay metalanguage:

	Metalanguage Adapted to Oral Contexts		*'This is my introduction.', 'This is my thesis statement.', 'My first topic sentence is…', 'These are my controlling ideas.'. 'My examples are….'*.
Technology Integration	Using audio-visual aids	Interview data based on interview questions in Januin & Stephen (2015)	'*I use Canva a lot. Sometimes, other students use better apps like Prezi. Not many use PowerPoint because it is old-fashioned. It is useless if I present but I don't use , but I don't use Canva.*' (S3) '*All students use presentation apps. No visuals means no road signs,no guides. So we can get lost easily.*' (S12)

Both Table 1A and Table 1B summarise the findings based on observations during the students' oral essay map presentations and students' interviews. The analysis identifies five main discourse competence elements exhibited by the student participants:

Leveraging Public Speaking Knowledge:

This includes employing paralinguistic strategies such as voice projection, eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions; effectively using audiovisual tools like Canva, PowerPoint, and Google Slides; and competently handling questions posed by audience members. While all participants demonstrated a variety of paralinguistic behaviours—some more confidently than others—only a subset successfully managed the audience's questions.

Applying Written Structure in Oral Presentation Organisation:

The observed presentations followed a consistent format that included six sections: salutation, introduction, title introduction, essay map, closing remarks, and a question-and-answer segment.

Employing Metadiscourse:

Students demonstrated strong discourse competence through their use of interactive and interactional metadiscourse while presenting their essay orally. Based on the observation and interview data, the students employed interactive metadiscourse, displaying the use of transitions and frame markers to guide their audiences coherently. It can be seen that the students consistently applied transitions like 'however,' 'therefore,' and 'in addition to' to signal shifts and logical flow. For instance, one student noted, "I started by explaining the main concept, and then I said, *however*, there's a different view we should also consider, to show possibilities" (S3). Another explained, "I used *in addition* to link my second point, so it doesn't feel too abrupt" (S9). These examples illustrate how students employed interactive metadiscourse to organise ideas, maintain cohesion, and direct listener attention—core elements of discourse competence in oral presentations.

Frame markers further highlighted this competence, with students signalling discourse structure using phrases like *first*, *next*, *finally*, *to conclude*, and *in this section*. Participant S5 shared, "I used *First* to introduce the background, then I moved on to the findings. I used *to conclude* when I want to summarise or conclude my points and presentation." Similarly, S2 stated, "I like to say things like '*in this part of my presentation*' just so people know where we are." Such strategic markers reflect discourse competence by clearly framing presentation stages, ensuring that audiences follow the progression without confusion.

Complementing *interactive* elements, students demonstrated interactional metadiscourse to build rapport and engage listeners, thereby reinforcing their discourse competence through audience-oriented strategies. Students further exemplified discourse competence through Hyland's interactional metadiscourse, employing linguistic knowledge to express stance, engagement, and attitude, thereby fostering audience rapport and persuasion in oral presentations. This category encompasses boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions that convey the presenter's position and invite listener alignment. For instance, one participant utilised persuasive boosters and

attitude markers to advocate health benefits: "Strength training for at least two days of the week can combat this and help you maintain weight loss. You will look good too." Here, emphatic assertions like "can combat" and the direct appeal "You will look good too" convey confidence while engaging the audience personally, thereby enhancing the motivation and impact.

Similarly, argumentative sequences revealed explicit stance-taking through self-mentions and explanatory boosters. A student elaborated: "The first reason for flood occurrence in Penampang is due to the overflowing Babagon dam. Why I said this. This is because the Babagon dam obviously failed to mitigate the effect of heavy rain and prevent flash flood engulfing low-lying areas in Penampang due to heavy rainfall." The rhetorical question "Why did I say this?" functions as a self-mention, transparently justifying the claim with evidential boosters ("obviously failed"), thereby constructing authority and inviting audience comprehension. These instances demonstrate interactional metadiscourse as a deliberate strategy that not only articulates the presenter's epistemic stance but also cultivates interpersonal engagement, integral to effective discourse competence in academic oral contexts (e.g., implicit appeals, such as "to show possibilities," in S3). Extended analysis from similar studies confirms that students often pair these phrases with "let me explain" or "as you can see," fostering a collaborative dynamic. This blend of interactive and interactional metadiscourse categorises technology-integrated presentations as advanced discourse competence, where linguistic knowledge navigates both content structure and interpersonal connection effectively.

Employing Metalanguage

Students frequently employed metalanguage, encompassing both public speaking and essay-specific terminology, to articulate the structure of their presentation and their intellectual process during oral delivery. Students exhibited discourse competence through deliberate use of public speaking metalanguage, signalling presentation structure and engaging audiences effectively. This metalanguage, distinct from written forms, includes phrases like "Hello," "Thanks for listening," "I will present…," and "My topic is about…." These markers immediately orient listeners, establishing rapport and clarity from the outset. For instance, opening with "Hello" or "Thanks for listening" at closure fosters a conversational tone, while "I will present…" previews content, guiding expectations. Such usage demonstrates students' awareness of oral discourse conventions, categorising it as interactive metadiscourse that enhances coherence and listener navigation in real-time presentations.

Beyond basic greetings, students applied essay-style metalanguage orally, adapting written discourse strategies to spoken formats for heightened transparency. Examples include "This is my introduction," "This is my thesis statement," "My first topic sentence is…," "These are my controlling ideas," and "My examples are…." These phrases explicitly label rhetorical components, mirroring academic writing scaffolds but suited to auditory processing. By verbalising structure—e.g., "My first topic sentence is…" before a slide—students reinforce logical progression, preventing audience disorientation. This adaptation highlights discourse competence, as it demonstrates mastery in translating literate metalanguage into interactive oral tools, thereby enhancing persuasion and comprehension in tech-integrated academic presentations.

Technology Integration through Audio-Visual Aids

The findings suggest that students' exhibition of discourse competence, particularly using technology—especially audiovisual tools—in thoughtful ways, enhances the clarity and ease of their oral presentations. Interview responses indicate that many students intentionally opt for modern digital platforms, such as Canva and Prezi, over more traditional options like PowerPoint, which some describe as less appealing or outdated. One respondent articulated this preference: "I use Canva a lot. Sometimes, other students use better apps like Prezi. Not many use PowerPoint because it is old-fashioned. It is useless if I present, but I don't use Canva" (S3). This selection process demonstrates an informed awareness of multimodal affordances, whereby students leverage visually dynamic interfaces to organise and delineate discursive elements effectively within academic settings.

Further analysis underscores the conceptualisation of audio-visual aids as indispensable "road signs" for audience orientation. As S12 observed, "All students use presentation apps. No visuals mean no road signs, no

guides. So, we can get lost easily." The absence of such technological support's risks audience disorientation, positioning these tools as a form of interactive metadiscourse. In this capacity, they visually signal progression, emphasis, and interrelationships among ideas, thereby reinforcing rhetorical clarity and engagement. Consequently, technology integration transcends ornamental function, manifesting as a sophisticated linguistic strategy that augments cohesion, persuasion, and overall communicative efficacy in spoken academic discourse.

DISCUSSION

This section examines the research question by comparing the findings with those of previous studies. The findings of this ethnographic case study offer an in-depth understanding of the discourse competence components exhibited by ESL learners in this specific mixed EAP environment. The findings are not designed for statistical generalisation due to the case's limitations and its intentional sample; however, they offer valuable contextual insights that can enhance theoretical understanding and guide pedagogical practices in analogous contexts (Barzelay, 2019; Drisko, 2024). The analytical generalisation of these findings is predicated on comprehensive descriptions of the context, participants, and observed occurrences, enabling readers to assess the relevance of these insights to their own educational settings (Moestrup, 2019).

Based on the interview and observation data, students appear to demonstrate five key features of discourse competence. These include using public speaking skills, organising their spoken presentations like written texts, applying metadiscourse and metalanguage, and incorporating technology. Interestingly, these findings still align with the earlier framework by Januin and Stephen (2015), which highlighted three essential components: public speaking, structured presentation, and language awareness. This study, however, expands that framework by showing how metadiscourse and the use of digital tools also play important roles. This broader view offers a clearer picture of what constitutes strong academic communication today—especially in learning environments that integrate language with technology (Mohamad et al., 2024; Rachman et al., 2023). The next section will examine how each of these five features is reflected in students' work and how they come together to support more effective academic presentations.

Leveraging Public Speaking Abilities

Public speaking competence, as reflected in this study, progresses beyond just verbal delivery. It includes paralinguistic features, such as voice, gestures, and digital tools, as well as handling questions from the audience. These findings align with previous research that emphasises the importance of a diverse range of presentation skills in academic contexts (Bankowski, 2010; De Grez, Valcke, & Roozen, 2009b; Morell, 2015; Zareva, 2009). The ability to manage audience questions effectively also echoes the observations made by Collins (2004). This study adds a stronger focus on multimodal discourse competence—how students combine non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions and hand movements, with visual aids. This aligns with recent work on how communicative tools shape academic and professional presentations (Lee, 2023; Weisi & Zandi, 2024). Notably, many students made conscious choices to use platforms like Canva and Prezi, demonstrating their awareness of how visual design and layout contribute to persuasive communication in academic settings (Mohamad et al., 2024).

Applying the Organisational Application of Written Structure in Oral Presentations

The aspect of oral presentation structure derived from written form was apparent in both observations and participant interviews. Students consistently followed a predetermined essay map structure during presentations, indicating a conviction in its educational and communicative significance. These results align with prior studies conducted by Bankowski (2010), Bruce (2008a), Hill and Storey (2003), and Zareva (2012, 2013). This adherence to a structured format, typical of written academic discourse, suggests a strategic transfer of learned organisational schema from textual production to oral delivery, thereby enhancing clarity and coherence in spoken presentations (Januin & Stephen, 2015).

Utilising Metadiscourse.

This study builds upon Januin and Stephen's (2015) work on cohesion, adding a new layer—interactive and interactional metadiscourse (Chen & Hu, 2020). It highlights how students use specific language features, such as hedges and boosters, to shape how their message is received and to strengthen their arguments (Dressen-Hammouda, 2002). The expanded view of linguistic knowledge encompasses purposeful rhetorical questions and transitional phrases, which facilitate audience comprehension of complex ideas and foster greater engagement (Zahari et al., 2023). This supports previous findings that underline the role of discourse markers and language use in persuasive academic and professional communication (Osman & Januin, 2021). These metadiscourse strategies also help manage the amount of information the audience processes at once, making dense content more accessible and easier to understand (Mohamad et al., 2024). Explicit instructions on the use of *'interactive'* and *'interactional'* metadiscourse in both writing and oral presentation classes may address students' linguistic difficulties in structuring arguments and engaging their audience effectively. This pedagogical approach can improve students' ability to not only convey information but also to guide reader interpretation and enhance the persuasiveness of their academic output (Mohamad et al., 2024). Furthermore, understanding metadiscourse is crucial for constructing well-structured arguments and enhancing audience engagement, particularly in academic oral presentations (Kaur & Ali, 2017).

When used effectively, these tools help presenters not only organise their points but also connect more directly with their audience, making their message more compelling (Mohamad et al., 2024). Altogether, this reflects a deeper understanding of discourse competence—one that moves beyond just being coherent to being more responsive and engaging to the audience (Januin & Stephen, 2015). The strategic deployment of metadiscourse also aids in improving multichannel consistency, ensuring that verbal, nonverbal, and visual cues are synergised to convey a unified message (Wu et al., 2024).

Utilising Metalanguage

This study demonstrates that students employ metalanguage to critically assess their communicative decisions and improve their discourse competence, aligning with previous research on metalinguistic awareness in language acquisition (Canals, 2023). This metacognitive capability allows them to deliberately modify their presentation techniques, consistent with research emphasising the significance of self-regulation in enhancing oral communication skills (Robillos, 2023). This encompasses the strategic application of rhetorical devices to captivate and persuade the audience, illustrating a nuanced understanding of how linguistic selections influence reception (Negretti, 2012; Nurhayati, 2023). This self-awareness encompasses an understanding of discourse competence, which encompasses linguistic, pragmatic, strategic, and intercultural elements essential for effective communication in diverse academic contexts (Januin & McLellan, 2016).

Incorporating Technology

The incorporation of technology in academic presentations is a distinct aspect of discourse competence, as it entails not only the delivery of content but also the proficient use of diverse communication modalities to articulate meaning clearly and cohesively within academic settings. Discourse competence encompasses the ability to comprehend and generate extended linguistic structures with suitable coherence and cohesion. The integration of technology—such as multimedia slides, videos, animations, and interactive tools—improves the rhetorical efficacy and thematic structure of presentations. It assists speakers in captivating audiences both visually and auditorily, reinforcing the verbal message with supplementary digital components. This multimodal communication strategy highlights the dynamic nature of discourse competence, particularly in an era when digital literacy is increasingly linked to effective academic presentation (Rachman et al., 2024; Kasim et al., 2022). This viewpoint corresponds with models that regard discourse competence as a fundamental component of comprehensive communicative competence frameworks, highlighting its significance in facilitating meaningful dialogues within contextual situations (Januin & McLellan, 2016; Restall et al., 2023). This research presents a novel perspective by highlighting the significance of multimodal metadiscourse, which includes non-verbal cues and visual aids, aligning with current scholarship on communicative resources in academic and professional presentations (Lee, 2023; Weisi & Zandi, 2024). The deliberate integration of digital platforms, such as Canva and Prezi, alongside the strategic use of visual

metadiscourse elements, exemplifies students' development of persuasive discourse in academic settings (Mohamad et al., 2024). The intentional integration of digital technologies transforms the conventional essay map into a dynamic and interactive platform, thereby improving the clarity and effectiveness of students' arguments (Januin & McLellan, 2016).

Furthermore, technology influences the construction and reception of discourse. Utilising digital tools necessitates comprehension of the norms and conventions of multimedia communication, the selection of appropriate technological resources, and the organisation of content to enhance understanding. This signifies an enhancement of conventional discourse competence to encompass digital literacy and multimodal communication skills, which are essential for modern academic settings. The incorporation of technological and multimodal skills into discourse signifies a significant transformation in academic communication, requiring presenters to excel not only in linguistic and rhetorical techniques but also to skilfully manage digital semiotics to effectively communicate intricate information (Fortanet-Gómez & Querol-Julián, 2019; Morell, 2014). This integration underscores the importance of accounting for technological mediation when examining emerging interaction patterns and sequential flow in academic discourse (Thorne & Hellermann, 2022).

Studies demonstrate that incorporating digital and multimodal presentations into educational environments not only improves linguistic and communicative skills but also fosters critical thinking, creativity, and audience engagement. Consequently, proficiency in technological tools and platforms constitutes an integral aspect of comprehensive communicative competence, which encompasses verbal, written, visual, and digital modalities. By doing so, presenters demonstrate their ability to adeptly handle complex discourse tasks, rendering technology integration an essential component of discourse competence in academic presentations. The incorporation of technological aids, such as presentation software, functions not only as a visual enhancement but also as a mechanism that can either enhance or undermine the perceived coherence of an oral presentation, contingent upon its adept utilisation (Alkhawaja et al., 2022). Utilising technology in academic presentations is not merely a technical ability but an essential communicative competence that enhances the overall effectiveness, clarity, and impact of discourse in scholarly settings. It illustrates the necessity for contemporary discourse competence to incorporate multimodal and digital literacies in conjunction with conventional language skills. This comprehensive viewpoint recognises that successful academic presentations necessitate not only linguistic skill but also an advanced comprehension of how visual and auditory components, facilitated by technology, enhance the overall communication process (Alghamdi, 2020; Melnyk, 2019).

CONCLUSION

In this single case ethnographic study, five key elements of discourse competence were identified as essential for effective academic oral presentations: leveraging public speaking abilities, employing the organisational application of written structure in oral presentations, utilising metadiscourse, utilising metalanguage, and incorporating technology. Identifying and classifying these elements aids in comprehending the complex requirements of academic presentations. This thorough perspective is essential for educators in developing curricula that effectively equip students for the intricate communicative challenges present in academic discourse, particularly within a progressively globalised educational context (Barrett & Liu, 2016). This comprehension can guide the formulation of pedagogical strategies that explicitly incorporate these competencies, transcending conventional language instruction to include wider communication and critical thinking abilities (Januin & Stephen, 2015). This framework provides a solid foundation for evaluating oral presentation skills, ensuring that assessment rubrics account for the intricate interplay of linguistic, rhetorical, and technological competencies (Jamaludin et al., 2020).

The study highlights the importance of students developing discourse competence to articulate their ideas clearly and effectively during presentations. It underscores the necessity for educators to possess a comprehensive understanding of the elements of discourse competence to effectively facilitate students' development. The findings suggest that syllabus designers should explicitly incorporate these discourse knowledge components into the oral presentation segments of EAP curricula to more effectively address the diverse skills involved.

The primary drawback of this investigation is its exclusive focus on a single case study, which limits the generalizability of its findings to broader educational contexts and diverse student demographics. Future studies should seek to validate these findings through multi-case studies, integrating a broader spectrum of academic disciplines and presentation formats to enhance external validity and provide a more comprehensive understanding of discourse competence in various academic contexts.

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