

# An investigation into the use of body language cues in English oral presentations by first-year EFL students

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**Abstract**—This study investigated the use of body language cues in English oral presentations by first-year EFL students. The subjects of the study included 87 first-year students at Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education and Faculty of English at The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies - (UD-UFLS). The data were collected by means of questionnaires, interviews and observations. Data analysis was based on qualitative and quantitative approaches. The main findings of the study were that although all of the students had positive awareness towards the roles of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in English oral presentations (EOPs), many students rarely or never used these body language cues when giving English oral presentations and some even fell into bad habits such as avoiding eye contact, using negative hand gestures and regularly showing stress on their faces when they made EOPs. Besides, feeling ashamed, feeling uncomfortable and feeling unfamiliar were students' three main difficulties when using eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in their EOPs.

**Index Terms**—body language, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, English oral presentations

## I. INTRODUCTION

In this day and age, communication skill is one of the 21st century skills which are universal needs in every aspect of life. Many studies have shown that effective communication is based not only on verbal messages but also on the meanings exchanged through non-verbal language. Moreover, while verbal messages account for only a small portion of the information exchanged, the meaning conveyed through non-verbal language constitutes a much larger part. Body language, including eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, postures, etc., is an element of non-verbal communication. According to Mehrabian & Ferris (1967), fifty-five percent of daily speech is conveyed through body language, thirty-eight percent is voice and only seven percent is the meanings of words.

Body language can be seen as a functional tool as it is used to clarify, confirm and complete verbal communication functions. For example, during an oral presentation, body language is important because it keeps speakers active during the oral presentation and when the audience see the presenters active, they will also be active in listening and engaging themselves in the oral presentation. By contrast, if the speaker fails to use body language effectively, the audience is more likely to lose interest in what he is saying. And the importance of the presented information will not be perceived no matter how engaging the speech is. Therefore, it can be said that the importance of the presenting good body language in communication is paramount.

In English language teaching and learning, the use of non-verbal language in general and body language in particular now have assumed an instrumental role in EFL classrooms. Almost all scholars have advocated the proper and justified use of non-verbal communication as a motivational strategy to support verbal communication (Gulzar & Asmari, 2013). Body language helps English learners express their thoughts and feelings besides their written and spoken words. With this view, the current study aims to gain an insight into first-year EFL students' perception of the importance of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in English oral presentations (EOPs); their use of these body language cues (BLCs) in EOPs; their difficulties when using these BLCs and some suggestions that help the students use these BLCs effectively, and thus improving students' English communication competence.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Previous studies related to the research topic*

Caswell and Neill (1993) provided teachers with non-verbal skills in getting their own messages across to classes and understanding the messages pupils are sending to them. Gregersen (2007) discussed the incorporation of body language into classroom activities. This article examined the indispensable role of non-verbal communication in the overall communicative process then considered the interplay of body language, particularly gesture, facial expression and gaze behavior, among interlocutors and gave special consideration to the second language learner and the obstacles that could be encountered in communicating cross-culturally. Pan (2014) studied non-verbal teacher-student communication in a foreign language classroom. The research concluded that the use of body language could not only attract students' attention, help them deepen their impression and imagination but also reflect the teachers' temperament and demeanor to strengthen their glamour.

In the Vietnamese context, at the high school level, Nguyen Duong To Uyen (2014) carried out a case study on high school students' features of body language in oral presentations. The findings showed that although all participants acknowledged the importance of eye contact and facial expressions in EOPs, their use of these two features of body language was limited. At the university level, most studies related to students' EOP skills mainly focused on three main aspects, namely students' attitudes towards

EOPs, factors affecting students' EOP skills and difficulties faced by students in EOPs (Nguyen Thi Phuong Nhung, 2009; Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy, 2010; Hoang Thi Hue, 2011; Hoang Thi Mai Hoa, 2011; Vu Thi Thanh Huyen, 2016). Yet, little research has directly studied the use of body language in EOPs by students at universities. Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc (2014) investigated the use of body language in oral presentations by English majors. The results showed that students did realize the importance of B.L in developing and completing their presentation skills; however, their actual performances regarding B.L in their speeches were not really effective. Pham Thi Kieu Oanh et al. (2016) conducted research to examine the use of body language in speaking by English majors. The researchers found that the students focused too much on the content that they were going to present while they neglected the role of the way to speak and hence their tendency to use negative non-verbal communication techniques. With the intention of filling the gap, the current study aims to explore the use of body language cues in EOPs by first-year EFL students to help improve their communication competence.

### **Theoretical Background**

#### *Non-verbal Communication*

Various definitions on the concept of non-verbal communication have been pointed out by a number of language researchers. According to Knapp (1972, p.20), non-verbal communication refers to "all communication events which transcend spoken or written words." Although this definition gives a general idea about non-verbal communication, it cannot tell the readers anything about its components. Then, Knapp and Hall (2006) added that non-verbal communication is a wordless form of communication, which is done by using facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, posture, touch, distance and tone of voice.

Nguyen Quang (2007) introduced a categorization of non-verbal communication into two sub-components which is clear, specific and easy to understand. The first component, according to him, is para-language, which concerns vocality and silence and the second component is extra-language which consists of body language, object language and environment language.

To sum up, often defined as communication without words, non-verbal communication refers to all aspects of a message which are not conveyed by the literal meanings of words.

#### *Body Language*

Body language is the unspoken element of communication that people use to reveal their true feelings and emotions. It includes many non-verbal behaviors such as eye contact, gestures, postures, facial gestures and touch. It can deliver different information, making a set of systems which is the same as language signal (Yu, 2002).

#### *Eye Contact*

Eye behavior has a higher probability of being noticed than any other bodily movements, so it is a much more prominent interaction signal. Through the use of eyes, people can control interactions, elicit the attention of others, and show an interest (or lack thereof) in the information being communicated by interlocutors (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000).

#### *Facial Expression*

Facial expressions are produced as the muscles of the face contract, creating facial configurations that serve communicative and emotional functions. The face is a primary means of managing interaction, complementing a response, and replacing speech. Knapp and Hall (2006, p. 260) asserted that facial expressions are the primary site for communication of emotional states, they reflect interpersonal attitudes and they provide non-verbal feedback on the comments of others.

#### *Gestures*

Michael (1988, p. 188) stated "Gestures include voluntarily bodily actions by hands, head or other parts of the body which are intended to communicate".

According to Ekman and Friesen (1969), body gestures can be divided into five groups: illustrators, regulators, adaptors, emblems, and affect displays.

- Illustrators are the most common type of gesture and are used to complement or accentuate the verbal message.
- Regulators are body language signals that serve to control turn-taking and other procedural aspects of interpersonal communication.
- Adaptors are gestures that facilitate the release of bodily tension.
- Emblems are gestures that can be translated into words and that are used intentionally to transmit a message and most often performed with hand movements.
- Affect displays are behaviors that express emotion.

#### *Oral Presentation*

An oral presentation is a useful way to deliver one's thoughts on any subject matter to the audience. According to Grez et al. (2012), oral presentation is a method to deliver a message to persuade or inform the audience of the subject matter that is being presented.

Oral presentations have been proved to have positive effects on learners' second language skills and their autonomy. According to Girard, Pinar and Trapp (2011), using oral presentations in classroom can lead to greater class interaction and participation, an increased interest in learning, and significant improvements in students' interpersonal skills and presentation skills.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted as a case study and attempted to seek answers to the following research questions:

- How do first-year EFL students perceive the importance of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in EOPs?
- How do they use these body language cues in EOPs?
- What are the difficulties faced by first-year EFL students when using the body language cues in EOPs?

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to obtain the data for the study.

Three instruments which were observation, questionnaire and interview were used.

Firstly, ten group presentations were observed and recorded on video. Each group had 3-5 students.

Secondly, the questionnaire prepared by Nguyen Duong To Uyen (2014) was adapted to gauge information about the use of body language cues in oral presentations. However, due to the differences in the scope of the two studies, some modifications were made to the original questionnaire. The current questionnaire requires the participants to answer 15 questions belonging to 4 parts. The first part includes three items about students' habits of giving EOPs and their evaluation of the importance of body language in EOPs. The three next parts are items about the use of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures by the students respectively.

Then, to collect insightful information as well as to cross-check the data obtained from the questionnaires, interviews were used as the third procedure for this study. The interview questions focus on the following points:

- Students' view of the importance of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in EOPs.
- Students' of use of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in EOPs.
- Students' difficulties when using eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in EOPs.
- Students' suggestions for their teachers to help them use eye contact, facial expressions and gestures effectively in EOPs.

The data obtained from observation were synthesized, compared and discussed. In terms of data collected from the questionnaire, the results were collected, condensed, quantified, and analyzed by means of the Microsoft Excel software according to the percentage. Regarding the data obtained from the interviews, they were summarized, grouped into themes and used to support the findings of the questionnaire.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the author piloted the questionnaire to three students. Responses were then used to make some minor or surface changes to the wording and order of the items. In relation to the interview, the author established the validity by piloting interview questions with two students to see whether they would understand and interpret the questions in the way the questions are intended. Feedback was used to make a few surface changes to the wording of the interview questions.

The participants of the study were 87 first-year students at Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education and Faculty of English at UD-UFLS. They were attending three English courses namely College Study Skills, Communicative Grammar of English and Integrated English Skills B1 in which they are required to deliver oral presentations regularly. These students took different parts of the survey. All participated in the questionnaires and 10 out of them were randomly chosen to join in the interviews.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

##### *The importance of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in EOPs in the students' view*

##### *Students' habits of giving EOPs*

**Figure 1** Students' habits of giving EOPs

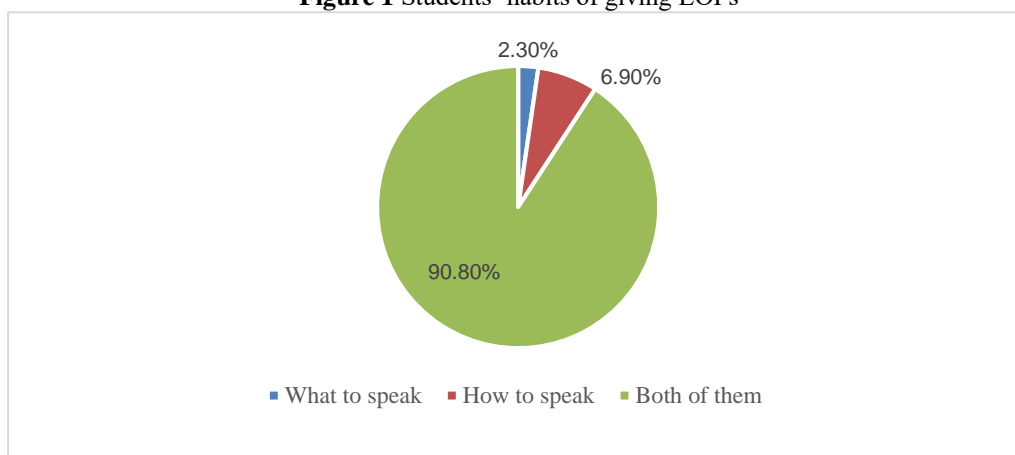
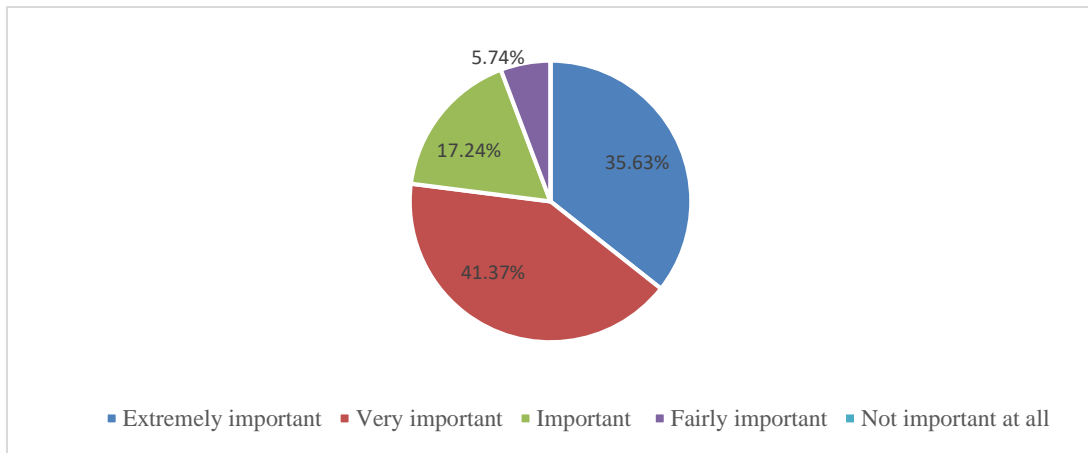


Figure 1 shows that most students placed equal weight on both the content of presentations and how to act in presentations. In fact, only 2 students (2.3%) focused on the words to use in their speech only and a small fraction (6.9%) stated that they paid attention to how to deliver their speech. Meanwhile, the percentage of students who cared about both the content of their presentation and the way they were going to perform accounted for 90.8%.

Sharing about what to focus on when giving EOPs, Student 2, in the follow-up interview, said "Before each EOP, I not only do a thorough investigation into what I am going to talk about, involve all relevant information to create an outline but also practice my presentation. I often record myself delivering my talk, using my cellphone. Sometimes, I present to my family members and friends and ask them to point out areas for improvement. I also spend about thirty minutes before the class rehearsing in the classroom where I will present to make myself more familiar with the space and setup".

##### *Students' evaluation of the importance of BL in EOPs*

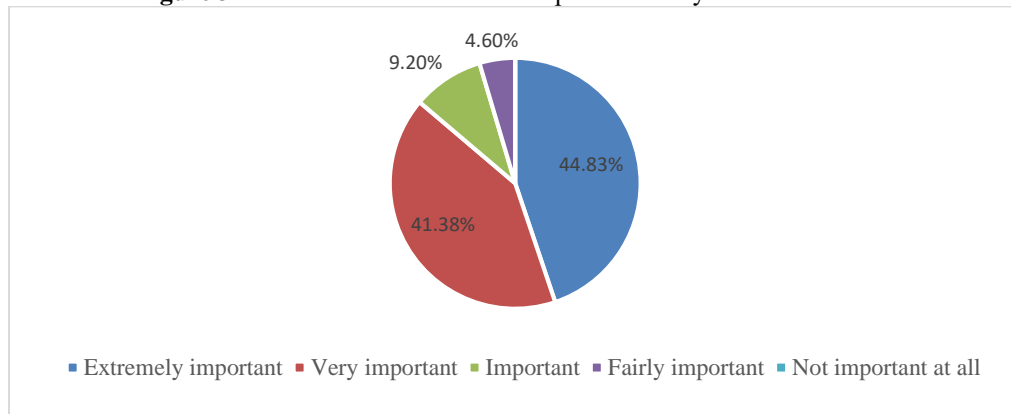
**Figure 2** Students' evaluation of the importance of BL in EOPs



According to Figure 2, all students were aware of the significance of BLCs in EOPs. To be more specific, 35.63% of the students considered BLCs as extremely important in EOPs, 41.37% very important, 17.24% important, 5.74% fairly important and none of the students denied the importance of BLCs in EOPs.

**Students’ evaluation of the importance of eye contact in EOPs**

**Figure 3** Students’ evaluation of the importance of eye contact in EOPs



As can be seen in Figure 3, nearly half of the students (44.83%) found eye contact extremely important while 41.38% and 9.2% believed that eye contact was very important and important respectively. Only four students, accounting for 4.6%, assumed that eye contact was fairly important. Strikingly, no student considered eye contact unimportant. Responding to this issue, in the interview, Student 5 shared “As eyes are the windows of the soul, by keeping eye contact with the audience, I know whether they understand the message I want to convey or what may make the audience confused and thus modify my speaking speed and give more explanations when necessary”. Similarly, Study 10 confessed “I think eye contact plays an integral role in presentation as it can involve the audience in the presentations. If the speaker looks at the ceiling or the floor or reads from the script, the audience may have the impression that the speaker does not care about them, which would be detrimental to the presentation's effectiveness”.

**Students’ evaluation of the importance of facial expressions in EOPs**

**Figure 4** Students’ evaluation of the importance of facial expressions in EOPs

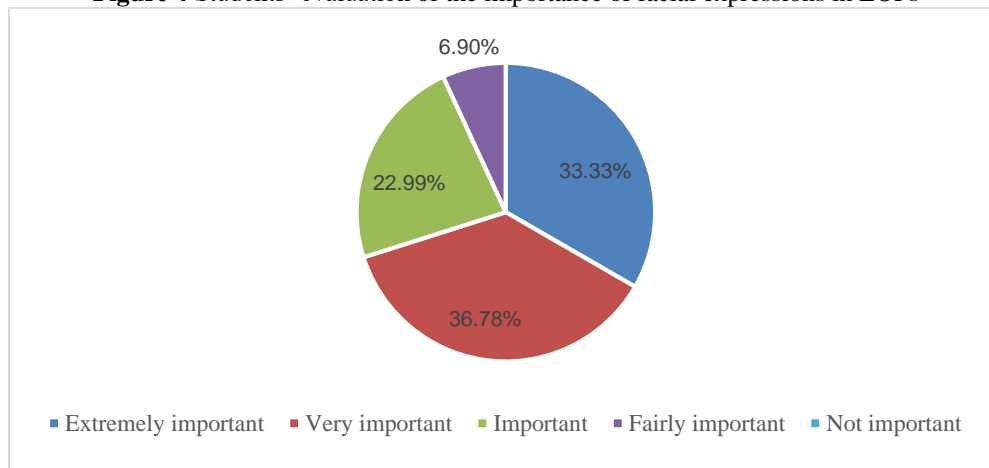


Figure 4 shows that the majority of the participants admitted that facial expression was of great importance (33.33% considered extremely important and 36.78% very important). It is notable that the percentage of students who found facial expressions fairly

important accounted for only 6.9% and no one completely denied its role. In the follow-up interview, Student 1 asserted “Positive facial expressions are a contributing factor to a successful oral presentation. If we are in a dilemma, what we should do is to smile”. Likewise, Student 2 commented “Using smiles or laughter in the right way is one of the strengths of facial expressions, which should be used for effective and persuasive speech. Conversely, showing a worried face may reveal that the speaker is not well-prepared or lacks confidence in himself, possibly preventing the audience from believing in what he is talking about.”

**Students’ evaluation of the importance of gestures in EOPs**

**Figure 5** Students’ evaluation of the importance of gestures in EOPs

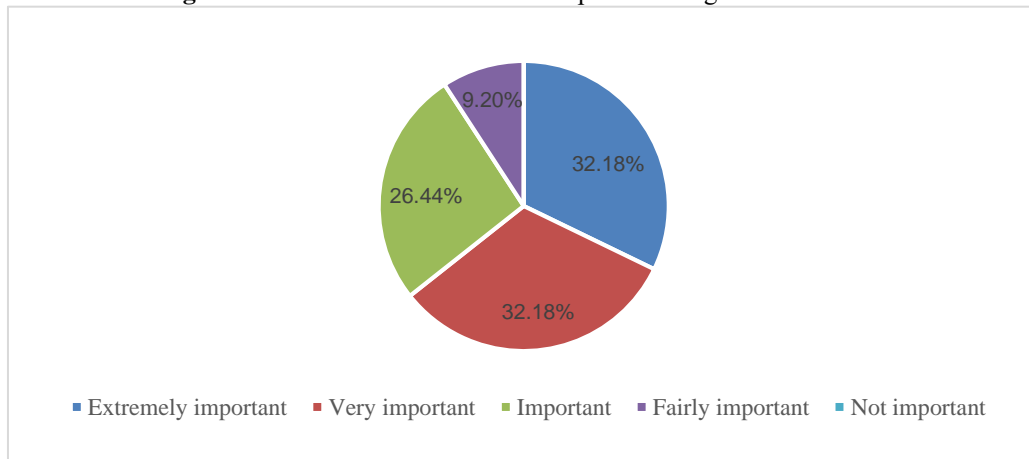


Figure 5 shows that just under a third of the participants thought gestures were extremely important in EOPs, 32.18% considered gestures very important and 26.44% agreed that gestures were important. 8 students, accounting for 9.2%, found gestures fairly important. It is interesting to find that none of the students discounted the role of gestures in EOPs. Replying to the interview question, Student 9 said “Adopting gestures properly in oral presentations can not only make the presentations more interesting and attractive but also facilitate the audience’s understanding of the content as gestures can be used to illustrate what the speaker wants to convey and assist the speaker in capturing the attention of the audience”.

Thus, it can be concluded that there was agreement among all students surveyed about the importance of body language in general and eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in particular in EOPs. The majority of these students acknowledged the enormous significance of these BLCs in EOPs. This is parallel to the findings of the previous studies on this issue (Nguyen Duong To Uyen, 2014; Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc, 2014; Pham Thi Kieu Oanh, et al., 2016). In addition, students participating in the interviews all admitted the role of these BLCs in EOPs as they can involve the audience, create an interesting and comfortable atmosphere, facilitate the audience’s understanding and hence greatly contributing to the presentation’s overall effectiveness.

**Students’ use of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in EOPs**

**Students’ use of eye contact in EOPs**

**Figure 6** Students’ frequency of distributing eye contact to the audience

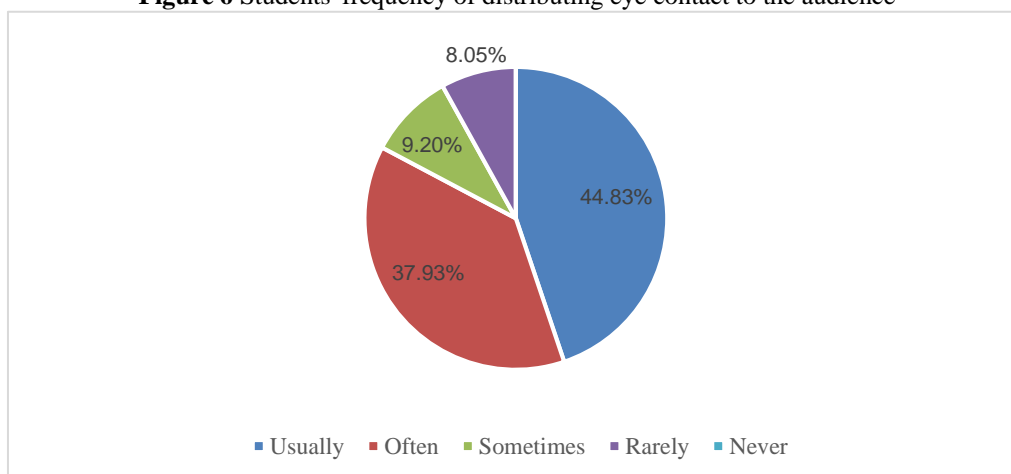


Figure 6 shows that nearly half of the students (44.83%) claimed that they usually maintained eye contact with the audience, many students (37.93%) often looked at their audience and 9.2% sometimes did it in EOPs. In addition, 5 students, accounting for 8.05%, indicated that they rarely looked at their audience in EOPs. And it is worth noting that no student stated that they never used eye contact in EOPs. However, the findings from class observation indicate that, among the 34 students observed, 25 students made regular eye contact with their audience, whereas 9 students rarely distributed eye contact to the audience or did not do it at all.

**Table 1** Direction of the students’ eyes in EOPs

Eye direction	Questionnaire (%)	Observation
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The teacher	41.38	8/34
Screen or scripted notes in hands	64.37	27/34
Ceiling or floor	13.79	9/34
Doors or windows	4.6	5/34
The audience	80.46	25/34
Others	1.15	0

As can be seen from Table 1, 41.38% of the students preferred impressing the teacher with eye contact and the number for this case in observation is 8. A small percentage of the students stated in the questionnaire that they avoided eye contact by looking at somewhere else in the class such as the ceiling or the floor (13.79%) and doors or windows (4.6%). Meanwhile, it was observed that 9 out of 34 students tended to look at the ceiling or the floor regularly while presenting and the figure for doors or windows is 5 students. Noticeably, a large proportion of students (64.37%) admitted that they often looked at slides on the screen or scripted notes. A similar result comes from the observation sheets when 27 out of 34 students had this eye contact direction. Gladly, most of the students (80.46%) confirmed looking at the audience and the data collected from observation for this case is 25 students. Additionally, 1 student revealed in the questionnaire that she often looked at her group members when presenting to feel more confident.

In the follow-up interview, Student 8 made some comments on her own use of eye contact in her EOPs "I think I make eye contact with the audience for 80 percent of the time of a presentation and sometimes I look away to avoid creepy staring. I make eye contact right at the beginning of my speech and I maintain this connection to observe the facial expressions of my audience. If they are expressionless, maybe they are bored and their minds are elsewhere. And it is time I did something to involve them in my presentation again". Meanwhile, Student 10 justified looking at the projector screen when giving EOPs "Sometimes, instead of keeping eye contact with my audience, I look at the projector screen because I want to direct the attention of the audience towards the key words or important information shown on the slides. In my opinion, the audience will register where I am looking so I look at the screen on which the audience should focus."

Furthermore, through class observation, the author of the study learned that some students merely read from the screen or their phones during their presentation without looking at the audience. Some tended to avoid eye contact and look at the ceiling or the floor when they were nervous or did not know what to say, which was supposed to help them become calmer and remember what to say next by Student 4.

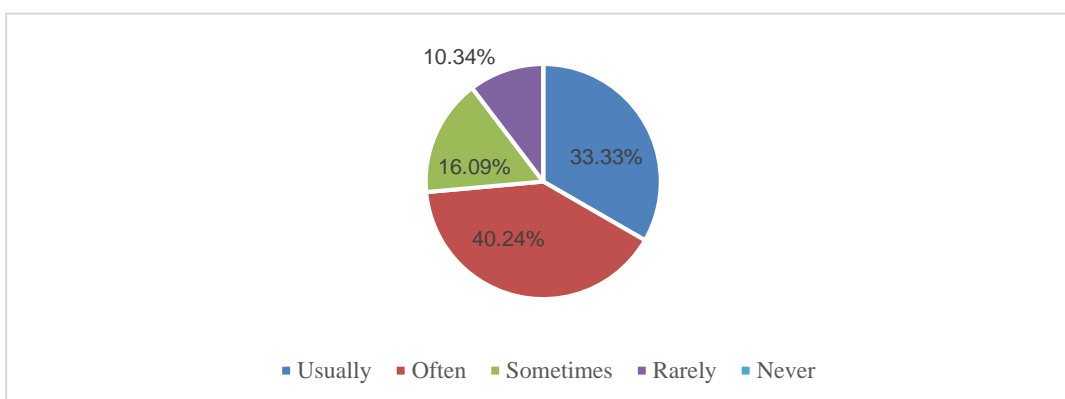
**Figure 7** Students' eye direction in EOPs



It can be concluded from these findings that although all of the students were aware of the importance of eye contact in EOPs, their use of this feature of body language was different when a quarter of the students participating in class observation did not adopt eye contact in presentations. This is not in agreement with the findings of Nguyen Duong To Uyen (2014) and Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc (2014), in which a great percentage of the students rarely or never made eye contact with the audience when giving EOPs. This difference can be attributed to the fact that when class observation was conducted, students in the current study were attending the course College Study Skills, in which they were trained in some techniques related to EOPs and they already had the opportunities to give EOPs. Thus, they seemed confident enough to keep eye contact with the audience when delivering EOPs.

**Students' use of facial expressions in EOPs**

**Figure 8** Students' frequency of using facial expression in EOPs



It can be seen from Figure 8 that a third of the students surveyed usually used facial expressions in their EOPs. The figures for students considering their use of this type of BLCs in EOPs often and sometimes are 40.24% and 16.09% respectively. 10.34% of the students confessed that they rarely used facial expressions when they spoke in front of the class. These data are in line with the findings from class observation when 27 out of 34 students often smiled or expressed stress on their face when delivering EOPs. However, while there was no student choosing the option “never” for their frequency of using facial expressions in EOPs, it was observed that 7 students showed no expressions or emotions on their faces during their presentations.

**Table 2** Students’ facial expressions in EOPs

Facial expressions	Questionnaire (%)	Observation
Using laughter/ smile	48.28	27/34
Using scowl	0	1/34
Showing the stress on the face	19.54	12/34
Showing free /eager face to talk	33.33	19/34
Others (no facial expressions)	0	7/34

According to Table 2, nearly half of the students (48.28%) smiled or laughed in their presentations and the number of students in this case in observation is 27. All of these informants tended to smile at the beginning or at the end of their presentations to create a comfortable atmosphere for their speech. Also, some of them smiled when they forgot the content of the talk. Understandably, that was the way they resorted to smiles to deal with the dilemma of knowing nothing to say. In some cases, the students smiled to their friends who answered the questions they raised, which could be because they wanted to encourage their classmates. Positively, a third of the students asserted in the questionnaires that they showed a free, eager face to talk. In fact, 19 out of the 34 students observed had this expression when speaking. By contrast, while a small percentage of students responding to the questionnaires (19.54%) were aware that they often showed stress on their face when giving EOPs, through class observation, the observer learned that 12 students felt stressed when speaking in front of the class. Although all of these 12 students smiled at the beginning and some also smiled when they finished talking, their facial expressions gradually turned negative and they seemed to stress when they moved to the main content of their speech. Besides, one presenter scowled in her EOPs at times when she paused for a long time and did not know what to say next.

**Figure 9** Students’ facial expression in EOPs

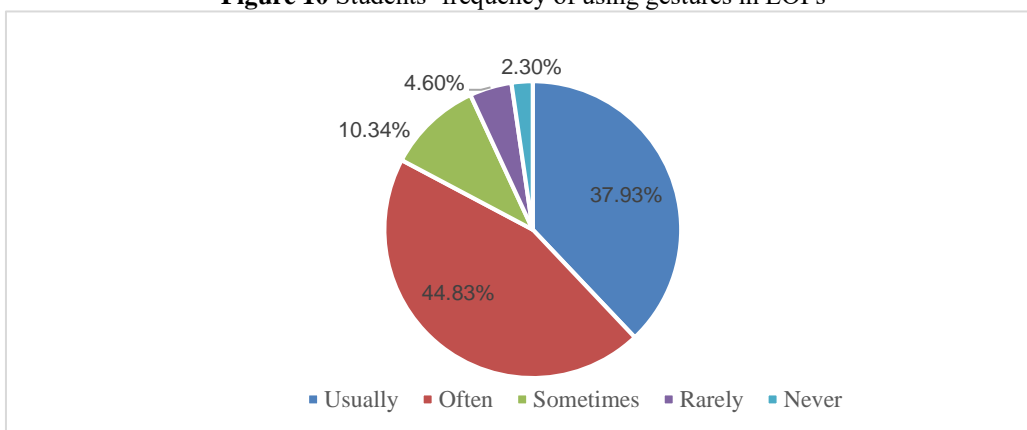


Sharing more about her own facial expressions in EOPs, Student 4, in the follow-up interview said “I always try to free my face right at the beginning and smile to welcome the audience and set a good mood for them. I also end my talk with a smile to put my audience at ease with what they have just learned”. Similarly, Student 8 revealed “I try to use my face to support the content of my speech. My friends once told me that my facial expressions in a presentation were varied. I smile to create a positive and friendly atmosphere. Sometimes, when I invite participation, I nod to show my agreement, to encourage the audience to share their ideas and to show that I am listening.”

The above findings help to confirm that a majority of students were likely to use facial expressions effectively in their EOPs. Many of them tended to express positive emotions when speaking in front of the class such as smiles or an eager face to talk. However, many presenters appeared to use smiling only in some passive and unintended situations. They considered this facial expression pattern as a last resort to facilitate them in playing for time or calming down. Facial expressions displayed by some students even possibly showed that they were nervous or uncomfortable. These results are congruent with what was found in the study by Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc (2014), according to which, a majority of the students were likely to smile as a formality to start and end their talks; however, many students tended to smile when they felt worried or forgot the content and some did not smile at all.

**Students’ use of gestures in EOPs**

**Figure 10** Students’ frequency of using gestures in EOPs



As can be seen from Figure 10, the majority of the students frequently used gestures in their EOPs when 37.93% and 44.83% of the students chose the option “usually” and “often” respectively to describe the frequency of their use of gestures in EOPs. Additionally, 10.34% of the informants indicated that they sometimes used gestures when speaking in front of the class while 4.6% rarely did this. It is worth noting that 2.3% of the students confessed in the questionnaire that they never used gestures in their EOPs.

**Table 3** Gestures used by the students in EOPs

Guestures	Questionnaire (%)	Observation
Open arms with your palms facing upwards	49.43	18/34
“Show” gestures (showing the actual action of the messages you are giving)	72.41	12/34
Finger pointing	4.6	2/34
Hands in pockets	1.15	1/34
Others		
- Arms crossed on chest	1.15	1/34
- Hands behind the back		1/34
- Touching hair		2/34

Table 3 illustrates that while “show” gestures were the most popular among students responding to the questionnaires (72.41%), it was observed that students tended to open their arms with palms facing upwards most often when giving EOPs (18 students). This tendency can be explained by the fact that having arms wide, high with palms facing up can not only indicate openness and a willingness to share information but also make everyone in a room feel included in the presentations while “show” gestures help the speaker describe what he is talking about and thus facilitating the audience’s understanding of the content of the talk. Also, 2 students often pointed to the projector screen when they wanted their listeners to pay attention to the information displayed on the screen. Additionally, some students fell into bad habits of talking with hands when one student put his hands in his pockets, one had his arms crossed on his chest most of the time of his presentation and one kept his hands behind his back in the first part of his presentation. Besides, two students tended to touch their hair regularly when they felt nervous or forgot what to say next.

**Figure 11** Students’ gestures in EOPs



In the follow-up interview, Student 2 gave more details about her use of gestures “I usually use my hands to illustrate ideas and highlight points. Visualizing numbers is the hand gesture I use the most. Every time I enumerate, I show the corresponding gesture with the figures”. Likewise, Student 9 reported on the use of gestures as a way to reinforce the core of the speech “I do not move my hands very often in my EOPs because I think if I move my hands continually, I will distract my audience from the content and make it difficult for them to follow. I use hand gestures when I want to emphasize my main points and grab the attention of the audience. In TEDxTalks videos I watch on YouTube, I see many presenters open their arms and show the audience their palms so I imitate this gesture in my talk. Sometimes, I also use my hands to depict something”.

The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from these findings is that whereas some students knew how to benefit their EOPs by using appropriate gestures, many students seemed not to optimize the role of gestures in EOPs and thereby made different mistakes

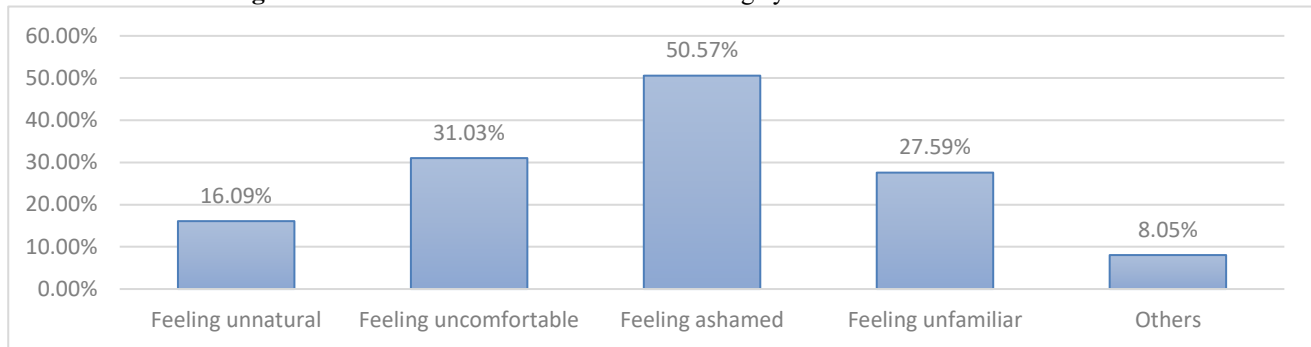


in connecting with the audience in terms of this crucial aspect of body language. This is in line with the results of the study by Pham Thi Kieu Oanh (2016) in which most students tended to use negative hand gestures such as making a fist and using pointing.

### *Difficulties faced by students when using body language cues in EOPs*

#### *Students' difficulties when using eye contact in EOPs*

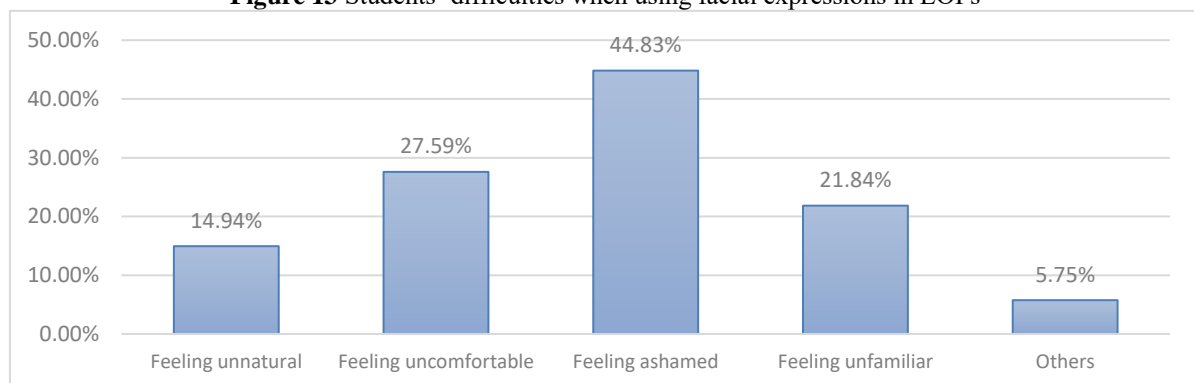
**Figure 12** Students' difficulties when distributing eye contact to the audience in EOPs



As Figure 12 shows, more than half of the students (50.57%) felt ashamed when keeping eye contact with the audience in EOPs, which accounts for the largest percentage of all. In one of the follow-up interviews, Student 3 shared “I want to keep eye contact with my audience during my presentations. However, whenever I find someone watching me intently, I feel ashamed and forget what I am going to say. I find myself unable to often look directly into other people's eyes while presenting. This makes me feel like I am being judged or scrutinized. I do not like this feeling at all. I think I have eye contact anxiety.” Having a similar problem, Student 6 found it challenging to maintain eye contact with the whole audience “I feel nervous when speaking in front of the class so I tend to look at my close friends or group members to seek encouragement from them. That means I cannot manage to keep eye contact with the whole class. When I look at other classmates, I feel so shy that I forget the content of my speech”. In addition, 31.03% and 27.59% of the students found distributing eye contact to the audience in EOPs uncomfortable and unfamiliar respectively. Some students shared in the interviews that they got nervous when they looked at the eyes of the audience while giving presentations. Therefore, they opted to look at the ceiling or the floor so that they could concentrate more on the content of their presentations and speak fluently. Besides, 16.09% of the informants admitted that they found it unnatural to use eye contact when making EOPs. Gladly, 7 students, accounting for 8.05%, confirmed in the questionnaires that they did not have any difficulties in making eye contact with the audience in EOPs. Some even felt more confident when they looked at the audience and knew that the audience paid attention to their talk.

#### *Students' difficulties when using facial expressions in EOPs*

**Figure 13** Students' difficulties when using facial expressions in EOPs



It can be seen from Figure 13 that the students who confessed that they felt ashamed when using facial expressions in EOPs made up the largest percentage, at 44.83%, followed by students who found using facial expressions in EOPs uncomfortable and unfamiliar, at 27.59% and 21.84% respectively. Additionally, a small number of students (14.94%) claimed that they felt unnatural with the use of this body language cue in EOPs and 5.75% of the informants stated that using facial expressions in EOPs was not difficult for them. Responding to this issue in the interview, Student 7 said “I do not know how my face looks in the eyes of my classmates so I am afraid of expressing emotions on my face. Instead, I want to talk quickly, finish my speech soon and come back to my seat.”

#### *Students' difficulties when using gestures in EOPs*

**Figure 14** Students’ difficulties when using gestures in EOPs

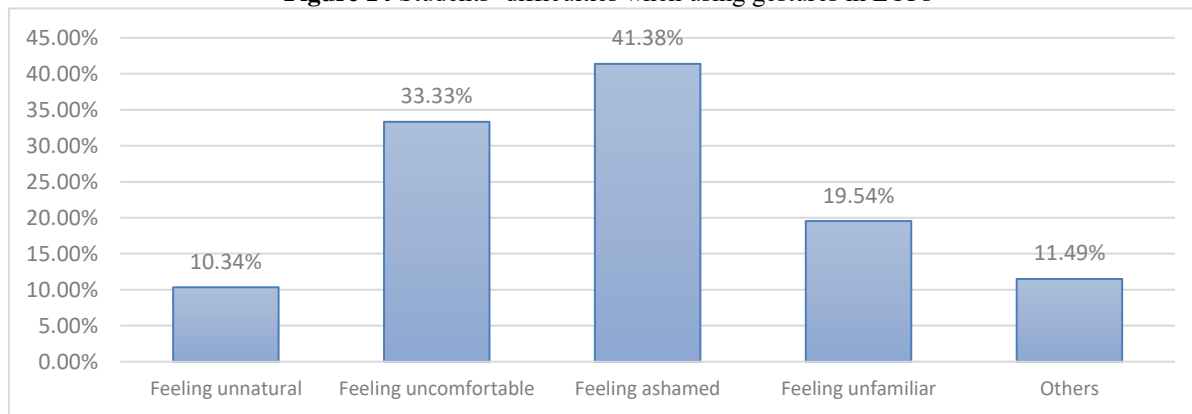


Figure 14 shows that 41.38% of the students felt ashamed when using gestures in EOPs. Similarly, a third of the students found this use uncomfortable, 10.34% found it unnatural and 19.54% found themselves unfamiliar with this use. Strikingly, 10 students, accounting for 11.49%, considered using gestures in EOPs as not difficult. Also, in an interview, Student 1 shared “I have the habit of keeping hands in my pockets when walking or chatting with my friends so I often keep the posture when I present in front of the class and my classmates do complain about that. I used to search for useful hand gestures for oral presentations and try to adopt them. However, I feel unnatural when doing that”. Besides, talking about this issue, Student 6 confessed “When I forget what to say next, I may repeat one hand gesture several times which I think is a meaningless action. Therefore, I feel unnatural and a bit embarrassed”.

**Students’ suggestions for the teachers to help them with their use of BLCs in EOPs**

**Table 4** Students’ suggestions for the teachers to help use BLCs effectively in EOPs

Suggestions	Percentage
Be a good model of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures.	51.72%
Let students watch some videos in which speakers use body language naturally and effectively when giving speeches/ presentations.	31.03%
Give feedback on students’ eye contact, facial expressions and gestures after their oral presentations.	90.46%
Equip students with communicating skills.	28.74%
Others	0%

As shown in Table 4, almost all of the students suggested that their teachers should give feedback on students’ eye contact, facial expressions and gestures after their oral presentations. In an interview, Student 5 confessed “ When I was at high school, most of the time, we learned by listening to teachers’ lectures and taking notes down on notebooks. I did not have many chances to give oral presentations or be taught about presentation skills, including the use of BLCs. Since I attended university, I have had more opportunities to give EOPs but most of them were group presentations and my teacher usually gives comments on the overall performance of the whole group, on our contents, slides and pronunciation. What I mean is that sometimes I do not know whether I did well or not. Therefore, I hope teachers will give more detailed feedback on each student’s performance, on our use of body language”. More than half of the students (51.72%) wanted their teachers to be good models of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures. Student 9 stated in the follow-up interview that he usually tried to watch and mimic his teachers using these BLCs when they delivered lectures so he hoped his teachers could be good models of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures. Next, nearly a third of the students (31.03%) hoped that teachers would let students watch some videos in which speakers used body language naturally and effectively when giving speeches/ presentations whereas 28.74% thought that teachers should equip students with communication skills.

Thus, the students gave some suggestions for teachers so that teachers could help them use eye contact, facial expressions and gestures more effectively. These suggestions were introduced according to the order of level of importance: from giving feedback on students’ eye contact, facial expressions and gestures after their oral presentations; being a good model of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures; letting students watch some videos in which speakers use body language naturally and effectively when giving speeches/ presentations to equipping students with communication skills.

**V. CONCLUSION**

This study has investigated the use of BLCs in EOPs by first-year EFL students. The data collected from class observation, questionnaire results and semi-structured interviews reveal that although all of the students had positive awareness towards the roles of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in EOPs, there seems to be a gap between what the students perceived and what they actually did in using these BLCs. While some students tended to know to take full advantage of these BLCs in their EOPs when they distributed eye contact to the whole audience, smiled, showed a relaxing face and used proper gestures in EOPs, many students rarely or never used these BLCs when giving EOPs and some even fell into bad habits when it comes to their use of BLCs in EOPs. More specifically, these students seemed to avoid eye contact, use negative hand gestures and regularly show stress on their face or scowl when they made EOPs. In addition, feeling ashamed, feeling uncomfortable and feeling unfamiliar were students’ three main difficulties when using eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in their EOPs. Furthermore, among these difficulties, feeling ashamed was the most prevalent.

From the findings in the previous chapter, the author of the study has provided some suggestions for a better use of BLCs in first-year EFL students' EOPs as below:

- Teachers should take a closer look into the use of non-verbal communication in general and body language in particular made by themselves and their students in order to develop specific plans which can work for this situation. The gap between the students' perception and what they actually did when utilizing BLCs in EOPs highlighted a problem that the students were not fully aware of their actual performance when giving EOPs, how they used BLCs in their speech and whether their use was effective or not. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to provide constructive feedback on students' use of BLCs as a way to draw their attention and instruct them simultaneously. At the same time, thorough guidance should be as specific as possible to facilitate students' acquisition of this matter. Perhaps, workshops and talk shows where experienced lecturers or professional speakers share experience in non-verbal communication with students could be organized. Furthermore, to provide a good example for their pupils to follow, it is suggested that teachers should be consciously autonomous to make the best of BLCs in their lectures.
- Policy makers and curriculum planners necessarily recognize the importance of body language in education, especially in English teaching and learning, and thus include it in the teacher education training programs. It is recommended that pre-service teachers should receive careful training in communicating body language, which potentially helps them be aware of the different impacts of body language on their teaching performance and become good models of using body language.
- It is obvious that efforts need to be made by students also. After being equipped with fundamental knowledge and orientation, students ought to take actions to hone their skills as "practice makes perfect". It is obligatory for the students to build confidence in language ability and communication. Students can start with practicing in front of the mirror, which potentially helps them advance in communication little by little.

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**APPENDICES A: QUESTIONNAIRE**

This survey questionnaire is designed for my research into “THE USE OF BODY LANGUAGE CUES IN ORAL PRESENTATIONS BY FIRST-YEAR EFL STUDENTS”. Your responses are very important to the success of the survey. The data will be used only for the purpose of research, not for any other purposes, and you can be confident that you will not be identified in any discussion of the data. Your co-operation will be highly appreciated.

Please answer the questions below.

1. What do you care about when making oral presentations?
  - A. What to speak
  - B. How to speak
  - C. Both of them
2. How do you rank the importance of body language in oral presentations?
  - A. Extremely important
  - B. Very important
  - C. Fairly important
  - D. Important
  - E. Not important at all
3. How do you rank the importance of eye contact in oral presentations?
  - A. Extremely important
  - B. Very important
  - C. Fairly important
  - D. Important
  - E. Not important at all
4. How often do you use eye contact in your oral presentations?
  - A. Always
  - B. Often
  - C. Sometimes
  - D. Rarely
  - E. Never
5. Where do you often look at during your oral presentations? (You can choose more than one option)
  - A. The teacher
  - B. Screen or scripted notes in hands
  - C. Ceiling or floor
  - D. Doors or windows
  - E. The audience
  - F. Others (please specify): .....
6. What is (are) the difficulty (difficulties) you have when using eye contact in oral presentations? (You can choose more than one option)
  - A. Feeling unnatural
  - B. Feeling uncomfortable
  - C. Feeling ashamed
  - D. Feeling unfamiliar
  - E. Others (please specify): .....
7. How do you rank the importance of facial expressions in oral presentations?
  - A. Extremely important
  - B. Very important
  - C. Fairly important
  - D. Important
  - E. Not important at all
8. How often do you use facial expressions in your oral presentations?
  - A. Always
  - B. Often
  - C. Sometimes
  - D. Rarely
  - E. Never
9. Which facial expressions do often use during your oral presentations?
  - A. Using laughter/ smile
  - B. Using scowl
  - C. Showing the stress on the face
  - D. Showing free /eager face to talk
  - E. Others (please specify): .....
10. What is (are) the difficulty (difficulties) you have when using facial expressions in oral presentations? (You can choose more than one option)

- A. Feeling unnatural
  - B. Feeling uncomfortable
  - C. Feeling ashamed
  - D. Feeling unfamiliar
  - E. Others (please specify): .....
11. How do you rank the importance of gestures in oral presentations?
- A. Extremely important
  - B. Very important
  - C. Fairly important
  - D. Important
  - E. Not important at all
12. How often do you use gestures in your oral presentations?
- A. Always
  - B. Often
  - C. Sometimes
  - D. Rarely
  - E. Never
13. Which gestures do you often use during your oral presentations? (You can choose more than one option)
- A. Open arms with your palms facing upwards
  - B. "Show" gestures (showing the actual action of the messages you are giving)
  - C. Finger pointing
  - D. Hands in pockets
  - E. Others (please specify): .....
14. What is (are) the difficulty (difficulties) you have when using gestures in oral presentations? (You can choose more than one option)
- A. Feeling unnatural
  - B. Feeling uncomfortable
  - C. Feeling ashamed
  - D. Feeling unfamiliar
  - E. Others (please specify): .....
15. In your opinion, what should your teachers do to help you use body language cues effectively in oral presentations? (You can choose more than one option)
- A. Be a good model of eye contact, facial expressions and gestures
  - B. Let you watch some videos in which speakers use body language naturally and effectively when giving speeches/ presentations
  - C. Give feedback on your eye contact, facial expressions and gestures after your oral presentations
  - D. Equip you with communicating skills
  - E. Others (please specify): .....

**APPENDICES B: OBSERVATION SHEET**

Date of observation:

1. Does the student often use eye contact in his/ her oral presentation?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
2. Where does the student often look at during his/ her oral presentation?
- A. The teacher
  - B. Screen or scripted notes in hands
  - C. Ceiling or floor
  - D. Doors or windows
  - E. The audience
  - F. Others: .....
3. When does the student tend to avoid eye contact in his/ her oral presentation?
- A. At the beginning or at the end of the presentation
  - B. Too focusing on content
  - C. Forgetting content
  - D. Feeling nervous, uncomfortable
  - E. Others: .....
4. Does the student often use facial expressions in his/ her oral presentation?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
5. Which facial expressions does the student use in his/her oral presentation?
- A. Using laughter/ smile
  - B. Using scowl

- C.Showing the stress on the face  
 D.Showing free /eager face to talk  
 E.Others:.....
- 6.Which facial expression is the most commonly used in his/her oral presentation?  
 A.Using laughter/ smile  
 B.Using scowl  
 C.Showing the stress on the face  
 D.Showing free /eager face to talk  
 E.Others:.....
- 7.When does the student tend to smile in his/ her oral presentation?  
 A.At the beginning or at the end of the presentation  
 B.Attracting the audience  
 C.Forgetting content  
 D.Feeling nervous, uncomfortable  
 E.Others:.....
- 8.Does the student often use gestures in his/ her oral presentation?  
 A.Yes                      B.No
- 9.Which gestures does the student use in his/ her oral presentation?  
 A.Open arms with your palms facing upwards  
 B.“Show” gestures (showing the actual action of the messages you are giving)  
 C.Chopping movements  
 D.Finger pointing  
 E.Hands in pockets  
 F.Others: .....
- 10.Which gesture is the most commonly used in his/ her oral presentation?  
 A.Open arms with your palms facing upwards  
 B.“Show” gestures (showing the actual action of the messages you are giving)  
 C.Chopping movements  
 D.Finger pointing  
 E.Hands in pockets  
 F.Others: .....
- 11.When does the student tend to use this gesture in his/ her oral presentation?  
 A.at the beginning or at the end of your presentations  
 B.attracting the audience  
 C.illustrating what he/ she is saying  
 D.emphasizing what he/ she is saying  
 E.Others:.....

Other notes:

#### APPENDICES C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that body language is important for your presentation? Why/ Why not? And to what extent?
2. How can eye contact/ facial expressions/ gestures facilitate your presentation?
3. When do you tend to use eye contact/ facial expressions/ gestures in your presentation? Why?
4. Do you face any difficulties when using BLCs in your presentation? In your opinion, what are the reasons?
5. What are your suggestions for your teachers to help you make good use of BL in presentations? Why do you think they can be effective?