Navigating the visual odyssey: Perceptions, hurdles, and creative solutions in Three Minute Thesis presentations

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This research scrutinises the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) participants' experiences, with a focus on the incorporation of visual rhetoric in the presentations. The study employed a mixed method with an explanatory sequential design. The participants were seventeen students ranging from bachelor to doctoral programs joining the Training-of-Trainer conducted by Leeds University, UK, and the State University of Malang, Indonesia. The data were collected through observations, video documentation, and self-reflections in casual interviews. The results showed that most of the participants perceived benefits though they experienced challenges during the preparation and performance. Hence, they learned to develop simple, bold, and little text visuals to engage the audience. Also, doing timed performance practice with slides, requesting peer feedback, and using visuals as presentation cues aided the participants in successfully doing 3MT with the visual rhetoric presentation. This study advocates the visual literacy enhancement to accompany the success of rhetorical performance in any educational context.

Introduction

In an age where information flows constantly, the ability to communicate effectively is not only a desirable skill but also a necessity, especially in the context of academic research (Grieve et al., 2021). Graduate students, early-career researchers, and seasoned academics recognise the importance of mastering the art of communicating complex ideas in ways that resonate with diverse audiences. Traditional academic presentations, which are often lengthy and technical, although useful in specialised contexts, have limitations when appealing to non-specialist audiences and the general public (Naegle, 2021). The *Three Minute Thesis* (3MT) presentation is emerging as a transformative medium, emphasising the combination of communication skills and visual literacy, revolutionising the way researchers communicate their work with the world (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2020).

The 3MT Presentation was originally a competition launched by the University of Queensland, Australia in 2008 (The University of Adelaide, n.d.). The 3MT Competition challenges participants to summarise complex research into a short, easy three-minute presentation that is understandable and engaging, with only a concise slide. The single *PowerPoint* slide is the only visual accompaniment allowed, and the audience is a casual, largely non-expert audience. This innovative format highlights the importance of effective communication, storytelling, and visual understanding, making it a valuable training ground for scholars at different stages of their academic journey.

The 3MT presentation stands out as a sign of change in the scholarly communication landscape. The presentation's core principles – conciseness, clarity, and accessibility – require participants to distil their research into an easy-to-understand narrative. The aim is

to convey not just the "what" but also the "what" of their research, emphasising its real-world relevance and social significance. Through 3MT, participants not only honed their communication skills; but they also perfected the art of concise storytelling.

To be a successful speaker in a 3MT presentation, the speaker should master the presentation content (Khan et al., 2017), possess enough language resources, have good communication skills, and be able to design suitable visuals (Grieve et al., 2021; Nguyen & Pham, 2022). Instead of being the master of the presented content, a 3MT speaker should be proficient with the language that he or she applied as a medium of meaningful delivery. When the presentation is conducted in English, the speaker should have a strong command of the English language. It includes some English components such as diction, pronunciation (Gilakjani, 2016), grammar, and fluency (Ho, 2018). If the speaker's language meets the needs of the content delivery and can support the 3MT speaker's rhetoric, the audience can easily comprehend the speaker's message. In addition, a 3MT speaker should have good communication skills which involves the ability to maximise body language and eye contact, articulate message with audible voice, and effectively use the time frame. Employing these communication skills would encourage the audience to engage in the presentation and enhance the audience's interest. Also, employing effective communication skills helps the audience to comprehend the presentation materials through non-verbal language. Finally, in the era of digitalised education, the 3MT speaker should be literate in applying visuals to enhance his or her performance (Kaya, 2020). In the presentation, visuals such as slides or pictures play an important role in supporting and elevating the spoken content. The speaker's ability to design appealing and informative visuals would not only create the audience's interest but also help to narrate the spoken information by exhibiting the key points effectively.

Visuals as the tool to assist the 3MT speaker would not be effective for presentation if the presenter cannot rhetorically employ it. This means that using images in a presentation will not be effective if the presenter cannot use them effectively to support his or her speech. Having images is not enough; presenters must be able to use them in a way that enhances their message and engages the audience persuasively and strategically (Kmalvand, 2015). This requires rhetorical skills, such as emphasising keywords and using vocal or physical cues to draw attention to important points. Additionally, presenters should focus on visual simplicity, using bold images and limited text to make it easier for the audience to understand key points. By simplifying slides with one keyframe per slide and a minimal amount of text, presenters can maintain a balance between providing information and ensuring clarity. Ultimately, the effectiveness of visual elements in a presentation depends on the presenter's ability to use them rhetorically to support their message and engage the audience. If the speaker is competent to effectively use the visuals to support the 3MT presentation, it means that he or she is visually rhetoric competent.

Upon commencing this investigation, we found that studies focusing on 3MT presentation were few in number. Liu et al. (2023) found that 3MT presenters applied examples, definitions, analogies, and reformulations to make the presented research accessible, coherent, and engaging to audiences. Their study focused on how rhetorical moves were built into the participants' presentations. In another study with a similar

focus, Carter-Thomas and Rowley-Jolivet (2020) explained that 3MT presenters applied two contextualisation strategies: (a) strategies to tailor the scientific information to the audience's knowledge base, focusing on the rhetorical structure and the explanatory strategies used to make the topic comprehensible, and (b) strategies to engage the audience's interest using various personalisation and interactional strategies. In another research that focused on the 3MT speakers' stance, Zou and Hyland's (2022) study showed that 3MT presenters used more positional resources and took stronger positions, largely by projecting certainty and creating a more visible author presence. Academic bloggers, on the other hand, preferred to minimise their involvement and emphasised the influence. Variations were explained in terms of method and context, especially the time-bound and directly competitive nature of the spoken genre and the critical reflexivity of blogging. To discuss the efficacy of 3MT presentation, Carol and Johansson (2018) stated that 3MT presentation trained doctoral students to deliver their research concisely and time effectively.

The practice of 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation served as the final two-day activity in a two-week *Training-of-Trainer* (ToT) program, conducted by the State University of Malang, Indonesia in cooperation with Leeds University, UK, from 9-20 October 2023. During these two days, ToT participants were tasked with developing and delivering 3MT presentations with visual rhetoric (refer to Table 2). However, their initial responses indicated unfamiliarity with the activity. Therefore, this study, conducted on 19-20 October 2023, aimed to examine their experiences with 3MT and visual rhetoric. Despite previous studies on 3MT, the role and impact of visual rhetoric remain largely unexplored. This research seeks to address this gap by scrutinising participants' experiences with 3MT presentations featuring visual rhetoric, including the challenges they encountered, and the strategies employed to effectively convey their research. Therefore, the primary research problems addressed in this study are as follows:

1. How does participating in 3MT affect the participants' perceptions?
2. What are the challenges faced by participants for 3MT with visual rhetoric presentations?
3. How do participants cope with the challenges of 3MT with visual rhetoric presentations, especially the designing of suitable visuals?

Literature review

The convergence of effective communication, visual rhetoric, and concise storytelling in the academic context has garnered substantial attention in recent years. As the academic landscape continues to evolve, driven by the need for interdisciplinary collaboration and the imperative to engage a broader audience, the *Three-Minute Thesis* (3MT) presentation emerges as a pioneering platform that exemplifies this transformation. Since the 3MT presentation employed visuals as a medium of rhetoric, in this study context, it is called 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation. This literature review surveys the existing body of research, shedding light on the key concepts of communication skills, visual literacy, and the unique 3MT format within the context of graduate education and academic presentation.

Communication skills in academic contexts

Effective communication has always been an essential component of scholarly work. In the academic realm, the significance of communication skills extends beyond delivering clear, concise lectures to students; it encompasses the ability to convey research findings to peers, professionals, and the wider public (Udovicich et al., 2016). Graduate students and early-career researchers face the challenge of articulating their research in a manner that is both accessible and engaging. This is particularly pertinent in a rapidly evolving world where interdisciplinary collaboration is often key to solving complex problems.

Communication skills in academia encompass various dimensions, including oral communication, written communication, visual communication, and digital literacy (Fähnrich et al., 2021). Each of these facets is essential for conveying research findings, sharing knowledge, and fostering meaningful dialogues. Scholars often rely on traditional academic presentations, such as conference talks, thesis defences, and lectures, as the primary means to disseminate their research. However, these conventional forms are often lengthy, technical, and tailored to specialist audiences, making them less effective for engaging the broader public and stakeholders outside the field. According to Lucas (2011), communication skills include the skill of employing body language (gestures), eye contact, voice modulation, and creating an engaging presentation.

The emergence of the Three-Minute Thesis (3MT) presentation

The 3MT competition was launched at the University of Queensland in 2008, emerging as a pioneering innovation that addresses the challenge of academic communication. This competition challenges graduate students and researchers to present their research in just three minutes to a lay audience. Participants were provided with a static PowerPoint slide to accompany their presentation. The 3MT format requires researchers to distil complex research into an easy-to-understand narrative, emphasising the importance of communication skills, storytelling, and clarity.

The key aspects of 3MT include brevity, clarity, and accessibility (The University of Adelaide, n.d.). Participants must convey the "so what" of their research, emphasising its real-world implications and societal relevance. The competition emphasises the development of transferable skills, offering a unique opportunity for participants to enhance their ability to communicate complex ideas to diverse audiences.

Visual rhetoric and its role in communication

Visual rhetoric plays a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness of communication, both in academic and non-academic contexts (Kjeldsen & Hess, 2021). Visual elements, such as images, charts, graphs, and layouts, can simplify complex concepts, evoke emotional responses, and enhance the overall understanding of the message being conveyed. Within the context of academic presentations, the integration of visual elements has been

recognised as an effective way to engage audiences and complement verbal communication.

Visual rhetoric in academic communication includes the strategic use of visuals to persuade, inform, and engage (Alim & Rahim, 2021). The choice of images, design, and layout, as well as the integration of colour, typography, and spatial organisation, all contribute to the persuasive and informative power of visual communication. Scholars often use visuals to provide context, illustrate key points, and create memorable, impactful presentations. In the present study, the participants' consideration of applying certain visuals to support their 3MT presentation might reflected their determination to succeed in their performance.

The intersection of 3MT and visual rhetoric

While the 3MT competition underscores the importance of effective communication, it also presents a unique context for the exploration of visual rhetoric within academic presentations. Given the constraint of one static PowerPoint slide or visual, participants must strategically employ visual elements to complement their spoken narrative. However, there is limited research on the role and impact of visual rhetoric within the 3MT format. This presents an exciting opportunity to delve into this uncharted territory, examining how participants use visuals and their rhetorical choices to enhance their presentations.

Gaps in the literature and the aims of the present study

Despite the growing popularity of the 3MT presentation, there is a dearth of research that examines the specific role of visual rhetoric within this format and how it intersects with the development of communication skills. This study aims to address this gap by providing insights into the strategies employed by 3MT participants in using visual elements and rhetoric to convey their research effectively. Furthermore, it seeks to uncover the impact of 3MT with visual rhetoric implementation on the participants who were not familiar with it. This study would also complement and expand upon previous studies such as Carol and Johansson (2018), Carter-Thomas and Rowley-Jolivet (2020), Liu et al. (2023), and Zou and Hyland (2022).

In a world characterised by information overload and short attention spans, the ability to communicate research effectively is not just a professional skill but a necessity. This research not only promises to enrich our understanding of how visuals can enhance academic communication but also to offer practical guidance for educators, researchers, and students seeking to elevate their presentation skills.

Methods

Design

This study employed a mixed-method explanatory sequential method to scrutinise the transformative intersection of communication skills and visual rhetoric within the context

of the Three-Minute Thesis (3MT) presentation, with a specific focus on the impact on participants' perceptions, participants' challenges, and the coping strategies applied, especially in developing visuals for the rhetoric. The need to provide a full grasp of this study issue drove the decision to use a mixed-method approach. According to Creswell (2016), qualitative research focuses on examining and comprehending complex social phenomena using methodologies such as interviews and content analysis. It aims to reveal underlying meanings, motives, and experiences that can be used to provide rich descriptive data.

Quantitative research, on the other hand, comprises activities such as gathering and interpreting numerical data through structured surveys and statistical analysis. This form of research seeks to measure and quantify phenomena, as well as uncover patterns, correlations, and generalisability. As a result, combining qualitative and quantitative data enables researchers to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. While quantitative data reveals the prevalence of attitudes, qualitative data reveals the underlying reasons and complexities behind those sentiments (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Our study began with the gathering and analysis of quantitative data via the observation checklist and 3MT video performance analysis, followed by self-reflection in casual interviews with participants. The interviews were intended to explain, corroborate, and elaborate on the results of the quantitative survey. In this strategy, qualitative data gathered through interviews was used to gain a better understanding of the patterns and conclusions shown by the quantitative data (Othman et al., 2020). Data triangulation was enabled by combining all of the data, increasing the validity and depth of the research findings (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012).

Participants

The participants were seventeen students who voluntarily and actively joined the Training-of-Trainer (ToT) program conducted by the State University of Malang, Indonesia in cooperation with Leeds University, UK, held from 9 to 20 October 2023. This study examined the participants' experiences during the implementation of the 3MT presentation activity, which took place on the last two days of the ToT program, specifically on 19-20 October 2023. Table 1 provides some demographic information, while Table 2 outlines the ToT procedures.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Gender	n	Education level	n
Male	6	Bachelor	1
Female	11	Master	4
		Doctoral	12

Table 2: 3MT with visual rhetoric implementation procedure

Day	Setting	Teacher's role	Student's role
Day 1	In class	The teacher explains what is 3MT performance. The teacher explains the criteria for being a good 3MT performer. The teacher shows the 3MT sample videos.	Students listen to the teacher's explanation. Students raised questions related to 3MT. Students decide on ideas for 3MT performance.
	Outside class	The teacher tabulates the students' pictures submission from her/his email.	Students draft the picture for a PowerPoint slide show. Students submit the slide to the teacher. Students may compose scripts for 3MT performance.
Day 2	In class	The teacher offers students the first performance. The teacher observes the students' 3MT performance. Teacher gives feedback.	Students show his/her best 3MT performance in front of the class. Students listen, take notes, and do reflection for improvement based on teachers' feedback.

Instruments and data collection technique

To collect the data, the researchers employed some instruments, each with a specific purpose. The following were used to collect data which later were analysed thematically:

1. *Observation*
   To assess the effectiveness of the 3MT presentations with visual rhetoric, the researchers observed students' live presentations in an educational setting. Observations focused on various aspects of the presentations, including content, use of visual aids, communication skills, and body language. Observational data was recorded using a structured observation checklist (see Appendix 1).

2. *Documentation*
   Video recordings were made of each student's 3MT presentation, capturing both the students' verbal communication and the visuals they employed. This documentation allowed for a quantitative analysis of the use of visual rhetoric in the 3MT format (see Appendix 2).

3. *Participants' self-reflection in casual interviews*
   After their 3MT presentations, students participated in casual interviews where they were encouraged to reflect on their experiences. These interviews were recorded and had already received consent from the participants. The interviews provided an opportunity for students to express their thoughts on the effectiveness of the 3MT format in enhancing their communication skills and visual literacy, the challenges they faced during 3MT performance preparation, and the coping strategies they employed to address these challenges, particularly in developing suitable visuals (Appendix 3).

Furthermore, during the casual interviews, the researchers maintained a neutral position with the participants to ensure that there were no power dynamics stemming from the researchers' roles as examiners or lecturers. The researchers were not directly involved in teaching or supervising the participants in the research study. They positioned themselves solely as researchers to collect data from the participants, considering ethical considerations to uphold the integrity of the data collection process and to respect the autonomy of the participants in sharing their insights. Consequently, the participants' identities were anonymised (referred to as P1, P2, P3, etc.), and they were asked for their consent to participate in the research.

Data analysis

The analysis of the data was separated into two steps. First, the quantitative data analysis was conducted by calculating the score of each participant's 3MT performance based on the observation checklist scoring rubric. Each item in the observation checklist was scored one. Hence, if each of the participants performed all the items, they would get a maximum score of ten (10/10 items). In addition, the statistical calculation was also conducted on the scores obtained from the 3MT video performance analysis. The video was assessed based on five criteria. Then each of the participants' performance would be grouped based on the following categories as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The category of participants' performance in the video recording

Assessment average score	Overall evaluation
0-2	Poor performance.
3-5	Below average performance.
6-8	Above average performance.
9-10	Exceptional performance.

Secondly, qualitative data obtained from informal self-reflection interviews were thematically analysed. The process began with transcribing the interviews, creating codes based on the transcribed data, and subsequently categorizing these codes into themes. These themes encompassed various aspects such as participants' perceptions of the implementation of 3MT presentations, the encountered challenges, and the strategies employed to overcome them, particularly in developing visual aids for rhetoric. For instance, one participant noted, "Adopting the 3MT style enhanced my pronunciation and fluency; it felt like an intensive English-speaking course!" This statement was categorised under the 'Elevating English proficiency' code. This way of coding followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) theory that the coding process requires the researcher to identify and label segments of data sources that contain information pertinent to the research question. Subsequently, all responses related to 'enhancing English proficiency' were collated into a theme labeled 'Perceived benefits by participants'. Similarly, responses regarding challenges encountered during 3MT preparation and performance were grouped under 'Participants' challenges', illustrating participants' accounts of difficulties faced (Table 4).

Table 4: Thematic analysis samples in the present study

Interview responses	Keywords	Codes	Themes
Presenting in 3MT style helped me improve my pronunciation and fluency. It was like a crash course in speaking English! (P2, P6, P8, P9)	Improve my pronunciation and fluency	Elevating English proficiency	Participants perceived the benefits of engaging in 3MT with visual rhetoric activities
I gained confidence in my English presentation skills, which is valuable for my future career. The 3MT format made me focus on clarity and impact. (P3, P10)	Gained confidence	Increasing participants' self-confidence	
Creating visuals that were both visually appealing and informative was a balancing act. (P5, P9)	Visually appealing and informative was a balancing act.	Challenges during preparation	Participants' challenges in 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation
Visuals sometimes felt like an afterthought. Finding the right balance between speaking and showing was a challenge. (P2, P6, P8, P10)	The balance between speaking and showing was a challenge	Challenges during performance	
I practiced my timing rigorously, ensuring that I spent just enough time on each slide to complement my spoken words. (P2, P4)	Practiced my timing	Strategies to meet the time allotment, done during preparation	The strategies to cope with the challenges
I asked my wife for advice and learned to cut down on text, focusing on impactful visuals. (P7, P9)	Cutting down the text and creating impactful visuals	Strategies to increase rhetoric efficacy and presentation	

The results of the qualitative analysis were used to discuss the findings of the quantitative analysis. In other words, following the flow of the explanatory sequential method, qualitative results were used to gain a better understanding of the patterns and conclusions shown by the quantitative data (Othman et al., 2020).

Findings

Participants' 3MT performance based on observation analysis

One of the data collection techniques applied was observing each of the participants' 3MT with the visual rhetoric presentation. The observer used the observation checklist to screen whether the participants had met the items of the performance. The results of the observations are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

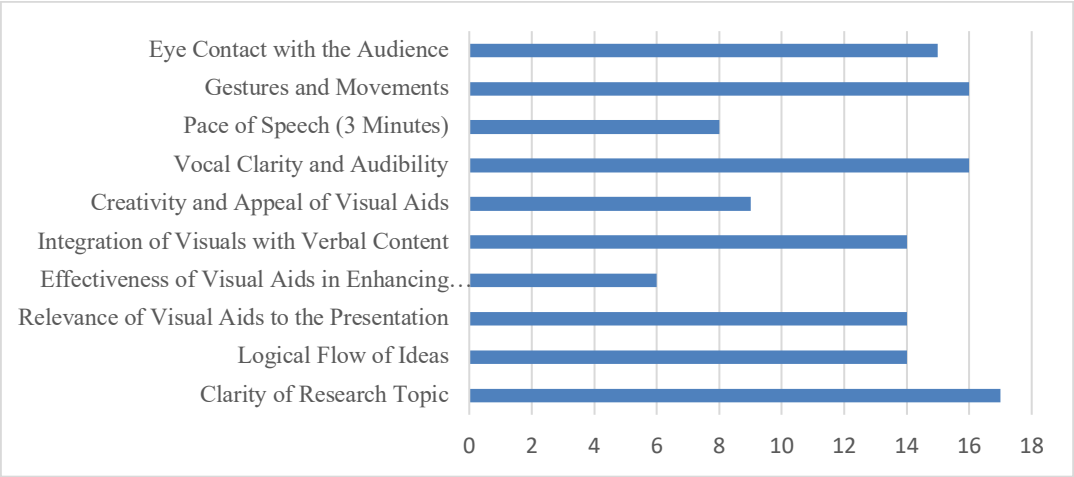

Figure 1: 3MT performance observation item scoring

Figure 1 shows that most of the participants had already successfully presented their intended topic for presentation as noted by the highest item score (score of 17). Also, most of the participants exposed good presentation skills as they could involve their body language, i.e., gestures and eye contact, and delivering messages with good vocal clarity and audibility. Nevertheless, the observation checklists showed that some participants could not exhibit visuals that enhanced audience understanding. According to the observers, some visuals were not relevant to the topic that the participants presented. Also, some participants did not use the time efficiently with some spending a lot on the introduction which resulted in them not finishing their content presentation.

Instead of analysing items on the observation checklist, this study also scrutinises each of the participants' performance from the lens of the observation. The results are shown in Figure 2.

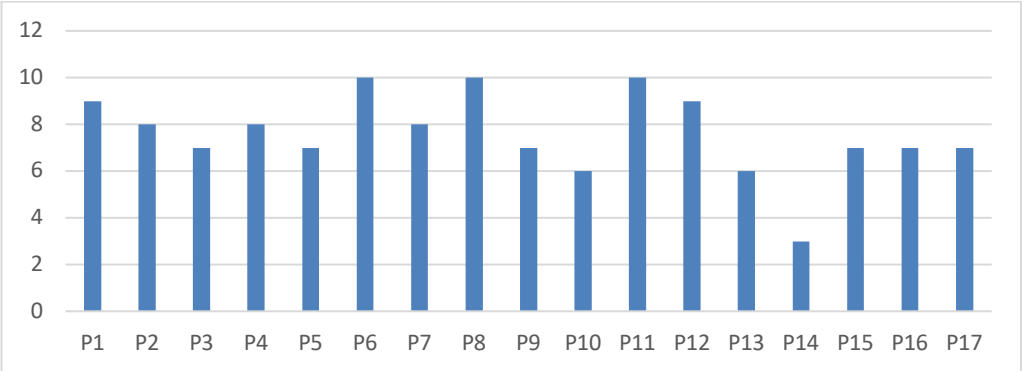

Figure 2: 3MT participant scoring, performance observations

Figure 2 depicts each participant's score based on the observation checklist scoring rubrics. The figure shows that only one participant achieved lower than score five. The

participant could not perform well during 3MT with a visual rhetoric presentation with the overlapping time, unfinished content presentation, limited gestures and eye contact, and absence of visual aids. On the other hand, the majority of participants performed well with three of the participants reaching a maximum score of 10.

Participants' 3MT performance based on video performance analysis

The data for the present study were also obtained from the assessment of the participants' 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation recording. The researchers scored the performances based on criteria with a score range from 0-10 points for each criterion. The results of the quantitative data are shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

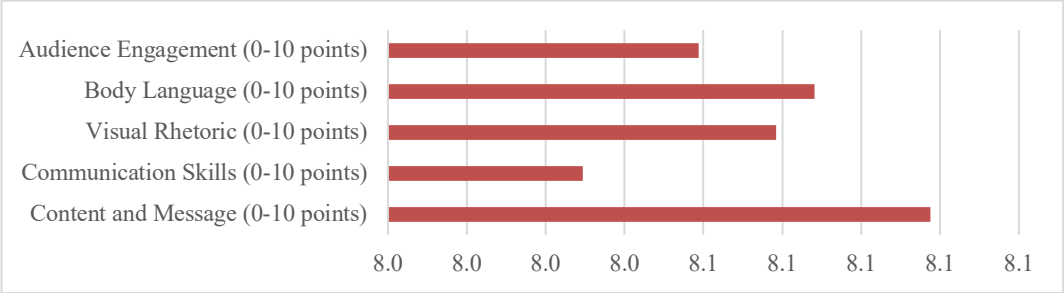

Figure 3: 3MT performance in video items scoring

Figure 3 shows that among the five items of the 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation performance, the items' scores were slightly different. It means that no item significantly dominated over other items in the participants' performance. Hence, most of the participants applied all the items as criteria for being a good presenter in 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation. In addition, this study also investigated each of the participants' performance from the lens of their 3MT with visual rhetoric video recording. The results are shown in Figure 4.

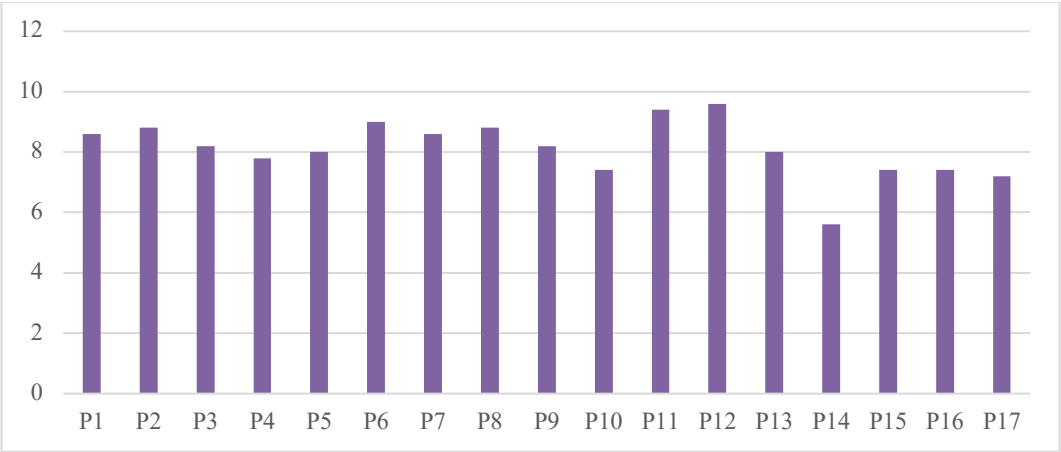

Figure 4: 3MT participant scoring, performance in video

Figure 4 shows each participant's 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation performance based on the video recording assessment. The results showed that most of the participants attained 'Above average performance' (see Table 1) and two of them depicted 'Exceptional performance'.

Participants' responses during the self-reflection in casual interview

Participants perceived the benefits of engaging in 3MT with visual rhetoric activities

According to the participants' responses in the casual interview, some participants considered that 3MT with visual rhetoric aided them in elevating their English proficiency. It helped them to improve their vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, as illustrated by the following or similar comment from others:

> Presenting in 3MT style helped me improve my pronunciation and fluency. It was like a crash course in speaking English! (P2, P6, P8, P9)
> 3MT sharpened my vocabulary and diction. It was like English language boot camp. (P5, P10)

In addition, some participants stated that this activity increased their skill to simplify the complex idea which was originally from long research results into more concise presentations.

> The 3MT format forced me to simplify complex ideas, which greatly improved my ability to explain things clearly in English. (P1, P7)
> It's my first 3MT and it challenges me to decide the most appropriate visual for my presentation. (P5)

Lastly, the participants admitted that this activity could impact positively their confidence and their communication skills by maintaining audience engagement.

> I gained confidence in my English presentation skills, which is valuable for my future career. The 3MT format made me focus on clarity and impact. (P3, P10)
> 3MT presentations improved my storytelling skills in English. I learned to engage the audience effectively. (P4)

Participants' challenges in 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation

3MT with visual rhetoric presentation requires the participants to prepare themselves before the performance. Based on the participants' responses in casual interviews, it was found that some were challenged to replace the discourse with visuals.

> Creating visuals that conveyed my message concisely was challenging. I had to strike a balance between clarity and brevity. (P1, P3, P4, P7)

Then, after the participants had already successfully replaced the idea or discourse with visuals, they found that creating appealing and informative visuals was tough work.

> Creating visuals that were both visually appealing and informative was a balancing act. (P5, P9)

During the performance, some participants also mentioned that creating a balance between describing visuals and explaining details of the discourse was difficult.

> Visuals sometimes felt like an afterthought. Finding the right balance between speaking and showing was a challenge. (P2, P6, P8, P10)

Participants' strategic solution to cope with challenges for the 3MT presentation

Participants were active students in the university as their research setting were being trained to be problem solvers. Hence, they applied some strategies to cope with their 3MT visual rhetoric challenges. Some practised a lot with or without a script to make sure that they mastered the content of the presentation. Also, they set a timer to maintain their performance were within the allocated time of three minutes.

> I used simple, bold visuals and practised my script repeatedly to sync with the visuals seamlessly. (P3, P6)
> I practised my timing rigorously, ensuring that I spent just enough time on each slide to complement my spoken words. (P2, P4)

Other strategies that the participants applied were asking for feedback from peers (i.e., classmates, wife, etc.) regarding their gestures, the simplified content, and the selection of visuals to gain a better impact on the audience.

> I sought feedback from peers and practiced extensively to make my visuals as effective as possible. (P1)
> I asked my wife for advice and learned to cut down on text, focusing on impactful visuals. (P7, P9)

Then, to get a clue on how to do the 3MT with the visual rhetoric presentation, a participant searched for the 3MT video performance on *YouTube* and learned from it. He/she learned how to present the visual, how to perform in front of the audience, and how to develop both content and the visual for performance.

> I studied the existing 3MT videos visually to develop mine and learned how to present it. (P5)

Next, the participants considered visuals not only as the materials that they should present in 3MT with the visual rhetoric presentation, but they used them as cues or points to guide them in starting the ideas of presentations. This way of thinking affected their visual design process.

> I designed visuals that served as prompts, not content, and used keywords to guide my narrative. (P8, P10)
> During my speech, I used visuals as prompts and highlighted keywords that related to the visuals on the slide. This approach helped me maintain a harmonious balance between the different elements of my presentation. (P9)

Lastly, to be specific on developing the visual as their rhetoric, the participants prefer to develop simple visuals with bold pictures and minimum text to aid the audience easier grabbing the spoken information.

To make it easier for the audience to understand the key points of my presentation, I focused on visual simplicity by using bold visuals and minimal text. By having one key image per slide, I was able to maintain a balance between providing information and ensuring clarity. (P1, P5, P7)

I simplified my slides by using one key image per slide and minimal text. This approach helped me maintain a balance between providing information and ensuring clarity, which was important for the success of my presentation. (P3, P6)

Discussion

Participants' perception of 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation

3MT with visual rhetoric presentation became the *Training-of-Trainer* program participants' new experience in conducting public speaking in an academic setting. Both from the quantitative and qualitative data, most of them showed a positive attitude toward it since it gave them many benefits in terms of language proficiency, communication skills, mental readiness, and organising ideas skills. Firstly, participants noted improvements in their English proficiency, including improved vocabulary, pronunciation (Gilakjani, 2016), and fluency (Ho, 2018). The intensive nature of the 3MT presentations, which was complemented by samples of 3MT video presentations by the tutors, provided them with a "crash course" in speaking English, sharpening their English language skills, and playing with vocabulary (Mahmood, 2023).

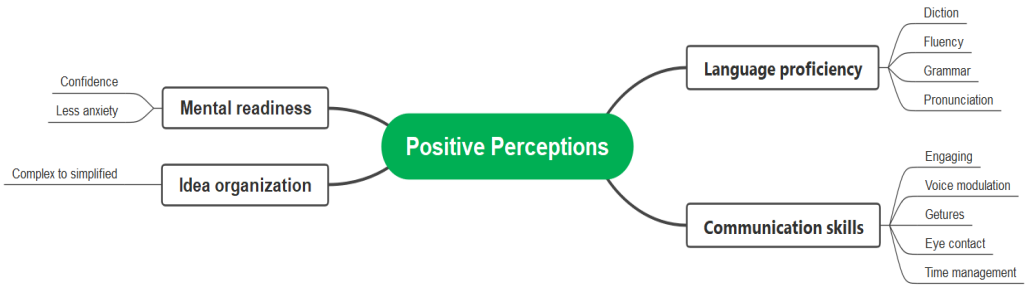

Figure 5: Participants' positive perceptions of 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation (use web or PDF reader 'zoom in' function to improve readability)

Additionally, this presentation model leveraged their communication skills as they were triggered to find ways of maintaining audience engagement and focus by raising interactive questions and choosing interesting visuals. They carefully decided where they should raise questions, make analogies, or create jokes to attract an audience (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2020; Liu et al., 2023). They also plugged and removed the pictures and chart when they hesitated on the best-suited visual for their presentation content and appeal to the audience. The visual selection process reflects the speakers' showcasing of their visual literacy skills. The speakers put some standards of the appropriate visual in a slide (Grieve et al., 2021; Kaya, 2020; Kmalvand, 2015; Nguyen & Pham, 2022). Some also said that during their rehearsals, they played with their voice volume and intonation, gestures, and eye contact. They would like to make sure that they could also transmit the message of the presentation through non-verbal language.

Another significant benefit cited by participants was the boost of mental readiness, i.e. confidence and skills to organise ideas from complex to simplified. They learned to manage their anxiety about speaking publicly. Some confessed that they did not put their eyes on the audience but wandered around the entire room to reduce stress. Some mumbled the presentation script during the waiting time for the performance turn. Then, the majority said that the more they practise the better their 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation performance. They could manage how long the information should be presented in a three-minute presentation, where they should pause and start the next sentence, and what information should be cut out (Carol & Johansson, 2018; Khan et al., 2017). They also admitted that their past presentation performances affected their mental readiness. A participant confessed that she admired another participant since the one had a lot of public speaking experience and it led her to exhibit outstanding stage acts for 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation.

Participants' challenges on 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation

Along with positive attitudes toward SMT with a visual rhetoric presentation, participants acknowledged challenges encountered during their preparation and performance. These challenges were multifaceted, starting with the need to replace discourse with visuals effectively. Alim and Rahim (2021) explained that 3MT speakers should be visually literate to aid them in skilfully aligning visuals and information. Creating visuals that conveyed messages concisely while maintaining clarity was a demanding task. Furthermore, participants encountered difficulties in creating visually appealing and informative visuals (Raiyn, 2016; Tshuma et al., 2022). The delicate balance between aesthetics and content-driven design requires careful consideration and skill (Grieve et al., 2021; Kaya, 2020; Kmalvand, 2015; Nguyen & Pham, 2022).

During the performance, the participants faced the challenge of balancing verbal explanations with the display of visuals. Bobek and Tversky (2016) stated that visual presentation demands the preciseness of rhetoric to aid the audience's understanding with coherent and correlated images and diction. Striking this balance was crucial to maintaining audience engagement and ensuring that the visuals complemented the spoken narrative effectively. Based on the observations and the assessment of the recordings, few participants were able to use the visual strategically to meet their intended purpose i.e., persuading, maintaining engagement, and delivering narratives (i.e., P6, P8, P11, see Figure 2). In addition, some exceeded the given time frame (three minutes). They admitted that insufficient practice and lack of attention to timekeeping led to problems (e.g.., P14, see Figure 2). The anxiety that some participants experienced also delayed their focus on the time (Lall et al., 2020). All of these challenges became evident in the findings obtained through all of the instruments used.

Participants' strategic solution to cope with challenges for the 3MT presentation, especially in designing the visuals

The participants are all students who joined the Training-of-Trainer program due to their varied personal motivations. According to the participants during the casual interview,

they said that the motivation aided them to be resilient following any challenges during the Training-of-Trainer program (Muslimin & Suhartoyo, 2023). The participants' self-resilience developed their autonomy to find strategic solutions to cope with the challenges during the 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation activity. To address these challenges, participants employed strategic solutions. They engaged in rigorous practice (Wellstead et al., 2017), both with and without scripts, to master the content and ensure seamless synchronisation with visuals. They also practised time management to adhere to the three-minute limit, highlighting the importance of precision in this format. During the practice, they also searched for feedback from peers and even family members for input on gestures, simplified content, and visual selection. This external feedback was instrumental in refining their presentations. The feedback helped them to tune up their 3MT with a visual rhetoric presentation performance at any element for improvement (Novacovic & Teodosijovic, 2017). Furthermore, this applied strategy strengthens the importance of the learning community to enhance the readiness for language performance (Bon & Inpin, 2024).

Another strategic action to cope with the challenges is learning from existing 3MT videos on platforms like *YouTube*. It provided valuable insights into presentation techniques, audience engagement, and content development. This external learning source complemented their practical experience as they could learn from the successful model (Putra et al., 2022). From the model presentation also, the participants learned to redefine the role of visuals as not just presentation materials but as cues to guide their narrative. This cognitive shift influenced their visual design process and fostered a harmonious balance between the elements of their presentations. Simplicity was a key principle in visual design, with participants favouring bold visuals with minimal text (Kjeldsen & Hess, 2021). This approach aimed to facilitate the audience's comprehension and retention of key information.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the implementation of 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation activity which focused on the participants' perception, the challenges, and the strategic solution, especially related to the use of visuals as rhetoric. Hence, the research findings shed light on the comprehensive nature of participants' 3MT with visual rhetoric presentation performances, marked by proficiency in topic communication, effective non-verbal communication, and balanced use of visuals. Their self-reflection highlighted significant benefits for some elements such as language proficiency, mental readiness, idea organisation, and communication skills. However, challenges such as effective visual integration and balance during the performance were evident. Participants adopted strategic solutions to overcome these challenges, emphasising practice, feedback-seeking, external learning, redefined visual cues, and visual simplicity.

These findings carry implications for educators, students, and researchers seeking to enhance their presentation skills in an EFL context. The balanced approach to 3MT performances, as seen in the video analysis, underscores the value of holistic training in

presentation skills. The study also underscores the role of visuals in academic communication and the need for a balanced approach to presentation elements. Finally, due to the limited number of participants and research setting, further research is recommended to gain a broader understanding of a similar topics

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Appendix 1: Observation checklist

ID	Name	Tick for "Yes"
Content	Clarity of research topic	
	Logical flow of ideas	
Use of visual aids	Relevance of visual aids to the presentation	
	Effectiveness of visual aids in enhancing understanding	
	Integration of visuals with verbal content	
	Creativity and appeal of visual aids	
Communication skill	Vocal clarity and audibility	
	Pace of speech (3 Minutes)	
Body language	Gestures and movements	
	Eye contact with the audience	
	Score out of 10 (1 for each "Yes")	

Appendix 2: 3MT video performance analysis form

No.	Criteria	Score
1	Content and message (0-10 points)	
2	Communication skills (0-10 points)	
3	Visual rhetoric (0-10 points)	
4	Body language (0-10 points)	
5	Audience engagement (0-10 points)	
Scoring rubric	Total points for 1-5	
	Average score for 1-5 (Total points/5)	

Appendix 3: Interview prompt: Participants' self-reflection

The following are the prompts used to conduct casual interviews with the participants.

Item	Questions
Benefits of 3MT performance for EFL practice	• Can you share your insights on how participating in the 3MT presentation format has benefited your English language skills, especially in the context of EFL practice?
Challenges in developing 3MT performance	• Reflect on the challenges you encountered while preparing and delivering your 3MT presentation. • In particular, what challenges did you face in designing suitable visuals for your 3MT slides to support your presentation effectively?
Coping with challenges	• Can you describe the strategies or techniques you used to overcome the challenges you mentioned, especially those related to designing visuals?
Overall experience	• How do you feel your participation in 3MT presentations has impacted your overall communication skills and visual literacy?

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