

MODALITY ACTS AS A STRATEGIC PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT: EXPLORING FACE, STANCE, AND PARTICIPATION IN EFL LEARNERS' CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS

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Abstract

The importance of understanding modality role as pedagogical support in helping EFL learners manage face, build stance, and regulate participation in higher education contexts. This study aims to explore how modalities function as pedagogical support in helping English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners manage face, negotiate stance, and regulate participation in a higher education learning context. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 13 fifth-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Bulukumba. The research findings indicate that modalities—presented through text messages, voice recordings, emojis, gestures, intonation, and digital communication features—play a significant role in reducing anxiety, increasing self-confidence, and providing more flexible access to participation for students. Participants viewed modalities as “safe communication spaces” that allowed EFL students to express ideas, refine language structures before use, and negotiate meaning without direct pressure. To support language production, modalities also shape learners’ identities, social positioning, and emotional engagement in academic interactions. This study concludes that modality acts as a strategic pedagogical support that helps EFL learners manage their identity, attitudes, and participation more confidently and adaptively in academic interactions. The implication is that lecturers need to consciously integrate multimodal strategies into learning design to support face management, stance strengthening, and increasing students’ participation. This study contributes the language pedagogy and sociolinguistics by asserting that modality functions as an interactional resource that mediates face management, stance formation, and participation structures in EF contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Current developments in language pedagogy demonstrate a shift in paradigm from a structural approach to a communicative approach, placing greater emphasis on interaction,

identity, and the negotiation of meaning in the foreign language learning process (Jubhari et al., 2024; Baskal et al., 2024; García-Carrión et al., 2020; Syam et al., 2025; Sukmawati et al., 2025). In the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), communication is no longer viewed as a linear process of conveying messages, but as a social practice involving the strategic use of language choices to convey attitudes, build interpersonal relationships, and maintain self-image (Qin & Wang, 2021). One linguistic element that plays a crucial role in this process is modality. Modality is understood as a linguistic device that allows speakers to express degrees of certainty, possibility, necessity, permission, or attitude toward a proposition being conveyed (Guo, 2023). In pedagogical practice, modality functions not only as a grammatical component but also as a social and pragmatic tool that facilitates the construction of face, stance, and participation in classroom interactions (Liu et al., 2018).

English language learning in various EFL contexts, including in Indonesia, is often still dominated by learning models that emphasize grammatical accuracy and sentence structure over pragmatic and interactional skills (Syam et al., 2025). This condition results in students being able to produce correct sentence structures, but often experiencing difficulty using language pragmatically in social contexts. In classroom situations, many EFL learners face difficulties in formulating language strategies to express disagreement, express opinions, express doubt, or manage differing positions in academic discussions without threatening their self-image (face) or interpersonal relationships (Qin & Wang, 2021).

The study of face, stance, and participation provides an important theoretical framework for understanding how language learners manage their identities in interactions. The concept of face, as proposed by Goffman, refers to the social image that individuals seek to maintain in interactions. In the context of EFL learning, face-threatening acts (FTAs) often arise when learners are asked to criticize, question a peer's opinion, or express linguistic uncertainty. Modality serves as a mitigating tool to reduce these potential threats through the use of expressions such as "might," "could," "I think," or "It seems to me that." Thus, modality not only mediates language production but also maintains interactional harmony (Li, 2020). Given the varying interpretations of multimodality, the study concludes with a plea for enhanced collaboration between language and subject instructors (Grapin, 2019).

Meanwhile, stance relates to how learners express their epistemic and affective positions on a topic. Through modality, learners can demonstrate their level of confidence in their opinions, for example by distinguishing between "I know" and "I believe." (Cho, 2018) In academic contexts, the ability to take a stance is an essential part of their identity as critical learners and members of the academic community. However, many EFL learners still struggle to express their stance appropriately due to psychological pressures, limited pragmatic competence, and cultural norms that avoid confrontation.

The third aspect, participation, relates to learners' active involvement in classroom interactions. Participation does not only mean speaking, but also encompasses how learners structure their contributions, when they choose to speak, and how they align their roles in the conversation (Nazarova et al., 2018; Sujarwo et al., 2026). Modality helps learners manage participation through markers of hesitation, strategies for asking for clarification, and expressions of caution in responding. Thus, modality can be viewed as pedagogical support that socially enables learners to feel safe engaging in discussions even with an immature level of linguistic confidence (O'Neill et al., 2021).

Some previous studies have been conducted and found that the evolution of students' participation in learning and the influence of speaking modes on the patterns of this engagement across time (Bagheri & Zenouzagh, 2021). HyFlex is an advantageous course modality for enhancing student engagement at the graduate level, particularly in large-group business courses (Heilporn & Lakhali, 2021). This is where modality plays a crucial role as a

mitigating medium, a marker of stance-taking, and a tool that helps learners adjust their contributions to conversations (Kartal, 2023). In-person discussions facilitate prompt replies and direct engagement, while online discussions permit contemplation and more detailed responses (Barira Ibraheem, 2025).

Although various previous studies have discussed the role of modality in increasing learning engagement, the effectiveness of multimodal-based learning, and changes in participation patterns in language learning, no study has specifically explored how modality functions as pedagogical support in managing face, establishing stance, and regulating forms of learner participation in the EFL context in depth. Previous studies have emphasised aspects of educational technology, the effectiveness of multimodal learning models, or comparisons of learning modes, but have not explored students' subjective experiences in using modality as a socio-pragmatic strategy to mitigate face threats, express epistemic attitudes, and negotiate contributions in academic interactions. Thus, there is a theoretical and methodological gap that requires research on modality to be understood not only as a technological or grammatical phenomenon, but as a socio-interactional experience that shapes the identity, sense of security, and communicative position of language learners in academic spaces. Modality has long been studied in the context of functional systemic linguistics, pragmatics, and classroom interaction. However, studies of modality as a pedagogical support in relation to managing face, stance, and participation are still relatively limited, especially in the Asian EFL context, including Indonesia. Indonesian EFL in-service educators have demonstrated flexibility in incorporating multimodal literacy into their educational resources (Trisanti et al., 2022).

Previous research has focused more on classifying modality types or their role in academic writing, rather than on the implications of modality for classroom interaction dynamics and the development of learners' communicative identities. This creates a research gap that indicates the need for deeper exploration of how modality is used functionally by learners to build interaction legitimacy and language confidence. From a pedagogical perspective, a deeper understanding of modality has the potential to improve the quality of EFL learning design. Strengthening modality competency can help learners develop communication skills that are more responsive to context, more socially supportive, and more reflective in conveying attitudes or arguments (Qin & Wang, 2021a). Thus, modality can contribute to the development of interactionally competent learners who are not only able to produce accurate language structures but also able to negotiate social relationships, identities, and academic participation.

The urgency of this research is also supported by the need for educational institutions to prepare learners capable of participating in global academic discussions. Many Indonesian students participating in exchange programs, academic conferences, or international scientific forums still experience communication barriers not due to a lack of vocabulary, but due to an inability to manage stance and face through the appropriate use of modality (Trisanti et al., 2022). This demonstrates that modality skills are a crucial cross-cultural communication competency in the context of globalization in education and professional practice. Although numerous studies have discussed modality from the perspectives of grammatical, multimodal learning, and student engagement, there is still a gap in studies specifically examining modality as a socio-interactional strategy that helps EFL learners manage face, establish stance, and regulate participation in higher education classroom contexts. This study emphasizes that language learning is not only about mastering linguistic structures, but also a social process involving identity, interpersonal relationships, and communication culture. Modality provides a negotiating space that allows learners to enter interactions with greater confidence and direction. By understanding how modality helps learners manage face, stance, and participation, this research paves the way for EFL pedagogy that is more humanistic,

reflective, and responsive to the complexities of interpersonal communication in modern educational contexts. How do modalities function as pedagogical supports in helping EFL students manage face, negotiate stance, and regulate participation in classroom interactions in higher education? This study aims to explore how modalities function as pedagogical support in helping English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners manage face, negotiate stance, and regulate participation in a higher education learning context.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) design to deeply understand students' authentic experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), using modality as an interaction strategy to manage face, stance, and participation in an EFL learning context. The phenomenological approach was chosen because the focus of the research was not merely to describe the linguistic use of modality, but also to interpret the meaning of participants' experiences when they used this linguistic element in academic discussions, presentations, and classroom conversations. The advantage of the phenomenological approach in this research is its ability to explore subjective meanings and life experiences of students in depth, so that modality is not only understood as a linguistic form, but as a social-emotional strategy related to self-confidence, identity, and relationship dynamics in academic interactions. This research was conducted in the English Language Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Bulukumba and involved fifth-semester students who had taken courses based on speaking, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics, thus being considered to have sufficient experience in the use of modality in academic interaction contexts. Through this approach, the researcher sought to capture students' perspectives, strategies, challenges, beliefs, and perceptions (Creswell, 2014), regarding the function of modality as pedagogical support in classroom communication.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was carried out in several systematic stages according to the characteristics of phenomenology. Based on the observation results, lecturers obtain information regarding the level of English proficiency of participants (for example, based on the GPA of language skills courses or internal test scores) as well as their previous experience in studying modality, whether through pragmatics, speaking, or academic presentation practice courses, so that variations in the use of modality can be understood more comprehensively based on the linguistic background and pedagogical exposure of each student. The first stage was bracketing or *epoche*, which established the researchers' position as the primary instrument and suspended initial assumptions to ensure that data interpretation was not biased by prior experience or theoretical understanding. The next stage was identification and access, where the researchers coordinated with the study program and the lecturers to explain the research objectives and request permission to conduct the research. After obtaining approval, the researchers selected participants with relevant experiences. The third stage was data engagement, where data was collected through in-depth, face-to-face interviews, recorded with the respondents' consent. The final stage was analysis and meaning construction, where the data were parsed, labelled, analyzed, and interpreted to produce themes that illustrate the participants' collective experiences (Richards & Hemphill, 2018).

Research Instruments

The primary instrument in this study was the researchers themselves, the human instrument tasked with exploring the meaning of respondents' experiences through direct interaction. Supporting instruments included semi-structured interview guidelines, developed based on the research focus, covering categories of modality use in academic interactions, socio-linguistic experiences when using modality, forms of face and stance management, and

reflections on participation during learning. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on conceptual indicators of face, stance, and participation, which were then reduced to ten core questions with the same order and focus for all participants to maintain consistency, while follow-up questions (probing questions) were used flexibly to deepen individual experiences without changing the main framework. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that each question item has been explicitly mapped to the research questions so that there is a clear alignment between the research objectives, instruments, and the resulting data. Additionally, a voice recorder, field notebooks, and participant reflection sheets were used to ensure data depth and accuracy. These instruments ensured flexibility in interview exploration while maintaining the research focus.

Interview Instrument

Table 1
Interview Instrument

<i>No</i>	<i>Interview Focus</i>	<i>Guiding Questions</i>
1	<i>English Language Use Experience</i>	<i>Can you describe your experiences participating in English discussions or presentations in class? What feelings or challenges did you experience when speaking in front of peers and lecturers?</i>
2	<i>Awareness of Modality Use</i>	<i>When speaking or giving opinions in English, have you ever consciously used expressions such as “maybe,” “I think,” “probably,” or other modal forms? Why did you choose these forms?</i>
3	<i>The Function of Modality in Interaction</i>	<i>In your opinion, how does modality help you convey opinions, disagreements, or doubts when speaking in English? Can you give an example of a situation you have experienced?</i>
4	<i>Modality and Face Management</i>	<i>How do you feel when you have to provide criticism, correction, or differing views to peers or lecturers? Do you use certain words to maintain politeness or avoid misunderstandings? If so, what are some examples?</i>
5	<i>Modality and Stance Adoption</i>	<i>How do you indicate your level of confidence or uncertainty in your opinion in discussions? Does modality help you convey this attitude?</i>
6	<i>Modality and Participation</i>	<i>In your experience, does the use of modality affect your confidence or comfort in participating in class discussions? How does this influence manifest?</i>
7	<i>Influence of Socio-Cultural Context</i>	<i>Do you think cultural factors such as shyness, academic hierarchy, or politeness norms influence how you use modality in classroom communication? Why?</i>
8	<i>Comparison with Indonesian</i>	<i>Do you feel the use of modality in English is different from that in Indonesian? How do these differences affect the way you speak and interact in academic settings?</i>
9	<i>Modality Learning in the Classroom</i>	<i>Have you ever explicitly learned or been trained in using modality in class activities (for example, in speaking, pragmatics, or sociolinguistics classes)? If so, to what extent has this learning helped you in academic discussions?</i>
10	<i>Reflection and Pedagogical Suggestions</i>	<i>In your opinion, how should lecturers or study programs help students use modality more effectively to support confidence, politeness, and clarity of attitude in academic communication?</i>

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 13 fifth-semester students in the English Language Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Bulukumba. A semi-structured interview technique was used to allow the researchers to ask guiding questions while allowing respondents to develop their answers based on their personal experiences. Each interview session lasted 35-50 minutes and was audio-recorded after written informed consent was obtained. During the interviews, the researchers also took field notes, made non-verbal observations, and repeated clarifications to ensure the accuracy of their interpretation of the experiences. After the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and returned to the respondents for member checking as a form of data validation (Richards & Hemphill, 2018).

This study employed thematic analysis steps, including verbatim transcription, repeated readings to gain a comprehensive understanding, initial coding (open coding), grouping codes into thematic categories, and drawing out key themes aligned with the focus on face, stance, and participation. Triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results with field notes during the data collection process and participant reflection sheets to ensure consistency of meaning and reduce interpretive bias. To ensure data validity, the researcher employed member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trail techniques to ensure methodological transparency and credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach as developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). The analysis process consisted of six main steps. First, reading and re-reading, where the researchers reread the entire transcript to understand the context of meaning. Second, initial notation, where the researchers provided initial notes, including linguistic commentary, emotional experiences, and meaning units. Third, developing emergent themes, which involves identifying patterns of meaning that emerge from the data. Fourth, searching for connections across emergent themes, which involves organizing themes into a comprehensive thematic structure. Fifth, moving on to the next case, where the analysis process is conducted on other respondents without prior reference to previous results to maintain independence of interpretation. The final step is identifying shared meanings, which involves linking all analysis results to produce a collective theme that represents the respondents' shared experiences. Data validity is maintained through member checking, audit trails, triangulation of field notes, and researcher reflection throughout the analysis process (Creswell, 2013).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This section presents the results of an in-depth interview analysis with 13 fifth-semester students in the English Language Education Study Program. Data were analyzed thematically based on ten focus questions formulated in line with research questions on face, stance, and participation. Overall, the findings demonstrate a consistent pattern of experiences where modality is used not only as a linguistic tool but also as a social and psychological strategy in academic interactions. Students utilize modality to reduce anxiety, maintain politeness, negotiate positions, and build confidence in classroom discussions. Cultural factors, academic hierarchy, and prior learning experiences also influence how they use modality. The following table summarizes the interview questions, participant responses, representative quotes, and the researcher's interpretation of each major theme that emerged from the data.

Table 2
Interview Results

No	Interview Questions	Respondents' Responses	Respondents Quotes	Researcher Comments
1	Speaking Experience in EFL Classrooms	10 respondents felt nervous, afraid of making mistakes, and needed time to construct sentences; 3 respondents felt quite confident but still cautious.	<i>"I feel nervous and afraid if my friends or lecturer judge my grammar."</i> (R2)	Initial experiences indicate affective barriers that impact fluent communication.
2	Awareness of Modality Use	8 respondents used modality consciously for mitigation; 5 respondents were initially unaware but later understood after formal learning.	<i>"I use 'maybe' or 'I think' when I don't feel sure."</i> (R6)	Pragmatic awareness emerges through experience and explicit learning.
3	Functions of	The majority of respondents	<i>"Modality helps me</i>	The function of modality

No	Interview Questions	Respondents' Responses	Respondents Quotes	Researcher Comments
	Modality in Communication	stated that modality helped them express opinions, show uncertainty, and maintain politeness.	<i>sound softer and not too direct.</i> ” (R4)	is closely related to psychological comfort and interpersonal strategies.
4	Modality and Face Management	8 respondents felt that modality helped them avoid conflict when responding to peers' opinions. All respondents were cautious when speaking with lecturers.	<i>“If I disagree, I say ‘I agree but maybe...’ to avoid hurting my friend.”</i> (R1)	Face management is strongly influenced by politeness norms and social hierarchies in the classroom.
5	Modality and Stance-Taking	11 respondents felt that modality helped convey attitudes, opinions, and levels of confidence. 2 respondents felt that too much modality weakened arguments.	<i>“I use modality to show I'm not 100% sure but I still have an opinion.”</i> (R10)	The use of modality becomes a compromise between expressing opinions and maintaining harmonious relationships.
6	The Influence of Modality on Participation	9 respondents felt that modality increased their confidence in speaking; 4 respondents still hesitated due to peer assessment, not language.	<i>“When I hedge my statement, I feel more confident to talk.”</i> (R9)	Modality serves as a bridge to active participation, but psychological aspects remain a barrier.
7	Cultural Influences	12 respondents associated politeness, awkwardness, and academic hierarchy with their use of modality. Bugis-Makassar students appeared more cautious.	<i>“In our culture, we should not be too direct, especially to older people.”</i> (R7)	Cultural factors are a strong variable in shaping communication patterns and modality choices.
8	Comparison with Indonesian	Most respondents considered modality in English to be more explicit, formal, and academic, while in Indonesian it was more implicit and context-dependent.	<i>“In Indonesian, we don't always say it directly. In English it sounds clearer.”</i> (R12)	Differences in discourse systems across languages influence communication strategies and the adaptation of pragmatic competence.
9	Learning Modality in the Classroom	Five respondents felt they had studied them explicitly (speaking, pragmatics, sociolinguistics). Eight others felt they learned intuitively through assignments and discussions.	<i>“We learned it in pragmatics, but I understood it more in real presentation practice.”</i> (R3)	Explicit learning is unstructured; authentic practice is the most influential source of pragmatic competence.
10	Reflections and Pedagogical Suggestions	All respondents suggested using role-play, guided debate, modelling, and peer feedback for more targeted practice in real-world situations.	<i>“We need more real discussion practice, not only theory.”</i> (R5)	Pedagogical implications clearly demonstrate the need for experiential learning approaches and scaffolding.

The data show that modality is not just a linguistic phenomenon, but rather a social strategy related to identity, culture, and interpersonal relationships in EFL classrooms. EFL Students use modality to negotiate self-confidence, demonstrate academic behaviour, maintain politeness, and foster participation. However, explicit instruction, structured practice, and a supportive communication environment are still essential to optimize modality use in academic contexts.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that modality plays a crucial role as pedagogical support for fifth-semester English language students in managing face, forming stances, and organizing participation strategies during the learning process. Through a phenomenological perspective and an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, students' subjective experiences with modality use are revealed not only as a technical means of communication but also as a medium for identity, psychological protection, and representation of linguistic competence. To achieve optimal utilization of modalities in academic settings, it is still necessary to provide students with specific teaching, structured practice, and a communication environment that is helpful.

First, in the context of face management, most respondents indicated that modality helps them protect their identity when using English. According to Erving Goffman's theory of facework, speakers strive to maintain their self-image to avoid appearing incompetent, wrong, or embarrassing in front of an audience (Virtanen & Lee, 2022). In this study, the use of modalities such as text messaging, repeated voice notes, the use of emojis to soften meaning, or choosing asynchronous mode before speaking directly emerged as psychological mechanisms for maintaining positive face. The perspective on politeness strategies states that modality can help learners employ both negative politeness strategies (avoiding face threats) and positive politeness strategies (building social closeness). Thus, modality acts as a cognitive-affective mediator, enabling learners to participate more safely without feeling threatened by linguistic evaluation.

Furthermore, modality-based learning influences how students construct stances, namely how they express epistemic, emotional, and interpersonal attitudes in communication. Some students stated that they use specific emojis (👍 😊 😊) to signal agreement, humour, or apology without having to verbalize them. Meanwhile, others choose formal modality markers such as "In my opinion," "Based on this argument," or "I strongly disagree" when interacting academically through digital platforms (Noël et al., 2022). These practices demonstrate that modality allows learners to navigate levels of formality, social distance, and argumentative strength.

In the realm of participation, modality also plays a role in regulating the social dynamics of learning. Gumperz and Young's perspective on Interactional Competence explains that language proficiency lies not only in grammatical structure, but also in how learners manage turn-taking, responses, confirmation, and backchanneling. Based on interview findings, some students who lacked confidence in speaking spontaneously in class chose to initiate contributions through chat, Google Docs collaboration, or voice rehearsal before participating in synchronous discussions. This process demonstrates a form of self-regulated participation, where modality provides an alternative space for students to remain engaged without always having to perform live speaking.

Further interpretations can be linked to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, particularly the concept of mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Helou & Newsome, 2018). Modality here functions as a psychological mediation tool that connects students' actual abilities with their potential. The use of the record-and-review feature in voice messaging gives learners the opportunity to edit errors, correct pronunciation, and choose a more formal sentence structure before sending. This process demonstrates that modality creates a space for metalinguistic reflection that rarely occurs in face-to-face interactions. Thus, modality not only facilitates communication but also enhances linguistic awareness and self-monitoring skills, two essential components in the development of advanced language competencies (Syam et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the findings of this study demonstrate a strong link between modality and affective filters in language learning. According to Stephen Krashen's theory, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and social pressure can hinder the language acquisition process. In this

context, modality acts as an affective buffer. Many study participants reported that they felt more comfortable initiating communication via text or recording rather than speaking directly because it provided an opportunity to think, process, and organize language. This supports the argument that modality is not only a communication tool but also a pedagogical strategy for creating a low-stress learning environment (Bagheri & Mohamadi Zenouzagh, 2021). The primary strategies included transparent and trustworthy interactions to foster student behavioural engagement, connections with practice and learning support to enhance emotional engagement, and integration of practice, learning support, and the instructor's facilitation role to promote cognitive engagement (Heilporn & Lakhali, 2021).

The interpretations emerging from these findings also reinforce the multimodality theory, which states that meaning is constructed through a combination of linguistic, visual, digital, and gestural signs (Qin & Wang, 2021). Respondents indicated that multimodal-based EFL learning provides a more natural learning experience because human communication is inherently multimodal. The use of gestures during presentations, intonation during voice messages, additional explanatory text in chats, and even emojis as stance markers are complementary forms of meaning orchestration. This broadens the concept of literacy from monomodal linguistic skills to multimodal communicative competence (Zakaria et al., 2025). developing pedagogical and multimodal communication tools for vocabulary instruction (Wigham, 2017).

The research findings indicate that modalities help students establish safe communicative spaces, negotiate linguistic identities, and expand their participation repertoires in learning. These findings demonstrate that modalities are not merely technological components, but pedagogical elements that mediate the English learning experience at the affective, cognitive, social, and performative levels. Therefore, the conscious, planned, and goal-based integration of modalities is a crucial step in enhancing academic competence and participation (Evnitskaya & Berger, 2017; Crosthwaite et al., 2015). The evolution of students' participation in learning and the influence of speaking modalities on the patterns of this engagement across time (Bagheri & Mohamadi Zenouzagh, 2021a).

The findings of this study offer a new theoretical contribution by demonstrating that modality in English language learning functions not only as a communication channel but also as a psychological and sociolinguistic mechanism that shapes face management, stance construction, and participation regulation. Unlike previous studies that focused solely on modality as a technological support or presentation medium, this research reveals how modality is perceived as a safe space (affective buffer) that provides learners with opportunities to negotiate linguistic identity, refine meaning through multimodal features, and choose the interaction mode that best suits their confidence and language abilities. Thus, this research strengthens and expands theories of multimodality, facework, and interactional competence through the subjective experience dimension of EFL students, which has rarely been addressed in phenomenological studies (Zhang & Hwang, 2023).

Practically and pedagogically, the novelty of this research lies in its recommendation that modality should not simply be a complement to language learning but should become an integral part of curriculum design, assessment, and digital-based learning strategies. This study introduces the concept of "Modality-Based Participation Scaffolding," a step-by-step approach that allows students to move from low-stakes participation modes (e.g., text and asynchronous collaboration) to higher-stakes communication interactions such as live discussions or academic presentations.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that modality plays a crucial role as pedagogical support, helping EFL students manage face, establish stance, and regulate participation in English language

learning. Through EFL students' experiences, that modality is understood not merely as a technical medium but as a means of expressing linguistic identity, reducing communication anxiety, and increasing self-confidence and academic engagement. Communication modes such as text, voice notes, emojis, gestures, and digital platform features provide a safe space for students to practice, negotiate meaning, and choose forms of participation that suit their abilities and readiness. These findings reinforce the view that multimodality can be an effective learning strategy in supporting the development of communication competencies, especially in the context of foreign language learning, which demands flexibility, social sensitivity, and performative readiness.

This study recommends the explicit integration of modality into learning practices through activities such as academic role-play, guided debates with scaffolding of hedging expressions (e.g., I think, perhaps, it might be), and modelling the use of modality in presentations and class discussions. Lecturers are also advised to design step-by-step exercises that help students manage face when delivering criticism, develop argumentative yet polite stances, and increase participation through safe and structured linguistic strategies. Furthermore, providing pragmatic-based feedback and self-reflection can help students recognize the social function of modality as a tool for identity negotiation and academic interaction.

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. By agreeing to take part, the participants acknowledge that they have been informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study. Participants understand that their identities are kept confidential and that all information they provide is used solely for research purposes. They have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. By continuing, they give their informed consent to participate in this research under the conditions described.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data utilized in this study cannot be made publicly available due to strict adherence to privacy concerns and ethical obligations that safeguard participant confidentiality. This ensures compliance with ethical research standards and data protection regulations. However, researchers or interested parties who require access to the dataset for validation or further analysis may request it. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and must be deemed reasonable. Importantly, approval from the appropriate institutional ethics review board is mandatory before any data can be shared, to ensure that the proposed use aligns with ethical guidelines and participant consent terms.

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