



THE ROLE OF TEACHER NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Successful teaching and learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses depend on efficient communication. However, students' weak language skills frequently make it difficult for them to fully participate in class discussions and comprehend spoken input. Nonverbal communication from teachers is crucial in this situation. This article looks at how teachers' nonverbal cues, including posture, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and classroom movement, affect students' comprehension and engagement in EFL classes. The study illustrates that intentional nonverbal communication improves comprehension, lowers learner fear, and promotes active engagement by drawing on pre-existing theoretical frameworks and a small-scale classroom observation. Pedagogical consequences for EFL teachers and teacher education programs are discussed in the article's conclusion.

Keywords: Nonverbal communication, EFL classroom, student understanding, classroom interaction, teacher behavior.

Introduction

There is more to teaching in an EFL classroom than just imparting language skills. With students who might find it difficult to comprehend directions, explanations, and comments given in a foreign language, teachers must continually negotiate meaning. Nonverbal communication frequently serves as a parallel system that supports and reinforces spoken language, even if verbal communication is still essential to instruction.

Harmer (2007) asserts that teachers manage classroom engagement and express meaning through a variety of nonverbal behaviors, many of which are



unconscious. These activities become especially important in EFL environments because learners comprehend foreign language using contextual and visual cues. Nonverbal communication has been shown to improve student participation, foster a positive classroom environment, and aid in comprehension (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

This article combines theoretical debate with real-world classroom observation to examine how teachers' nonverbal communication can improve students' comprehension and engagement in EFL classes.

All forms of communication that do not use written or spoken language are referred to as nonverbal communication. Mehrabian (1972) highlights that nonverbal cues including posture, eye contact, tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures convey a significant portion of meaning in face-to-face interactions. Nonverbal communication serves a number of important purposes in educational contexts, including: strengthening spoken communications; controlling communication; communicating attitudes and feelings; giving comments.

According to Argyle (1988), nonverbal cues in social communication serve to shape interactions and convey intentions. Nonverbal cues are used by teachers in the classroom to convey encouragement, displeasure, approval, and the change of activity. For EFL students, who might not completely understand spoken explanations, these cues are extremely crucial.

The effect that teachers' nonverbal communication has on students' comprehension is among its most important contributions in EFL classes. Facial expressions, gestures, and visual demonstrations frequently give abstract or foreign language more tangible meaning. For instance, McNeill (1992) contends that gestures are essential to the production of meaning and are intimately related to speech. Gestures can be used to demonstrate vocabulary, grammar rules, or classroom directions in EFL training. When educators use gestures to support spoken explanations, students get multimodal input which enhances comprehension.

Additionally, facial expressions serve as instantaneous meaning and feedback signs. While a perplexed look can warn students of a mistake, a teacher's smile can convey encouragement or correctness. Such nonverbal input aids students in self-correction without disrupting the conversation, claims Scrivener (2011).

Additionally, pupils' attention is guided by the way teachers move and align their bodies in the classroom. Students are better able to understand instructional stages



when teachers stand closer to them during explanations or move toward the board during instruction.

Nonverbal communication not only promotes comprehension but also has a big impact on student involvement. Learners' uneasiness, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes frequently impact their participation in EFL classes. These affective barriers might be lessened or made more intense by nonverbal behaviors.

Making eye contact is one of the most effective ways to promote involvement. Appropriate eye contact conveys interest and involvement, as suggested by Hall (1966). Students feel appreciated and are more inclined to participate when teachers make eye contact, nod in response to responses, and make open gestures. A supportive classroom environment is produced by positive body language, such as forward leaning and relaxed posture. Conversely, learners may be deterred from speaking by negative nonverbal cues such as crossed arms, a lack of facial expression, or physical distance (Harmer, 2007).

In order to control classroom interaction and turn-taking, teachers also employ nonverbal communication. An invitation to speak is frequently indicated by hand gestures, pauses, and movement in the direction of a pupil. These techniques encourage active learner participation and help maintain a smooth interaction flow.

A small-scale classroom observation was carried out in an EFL classroom at a higher education institution to investigate the practical role of teachers' nonverbal communication. Twenty pre- intermediate-level students and one EFL teacher were among the participants. The following facets of teachers' nonverbal communication were the main focus of the observation: gestures; facial gestures; making eye contact; body alignment and motion; nonverbal communication.

During two 45-minute classes, organized observation notes were used to gather data.

The teacher regularly employed gestures to clarify vocabulary and grammar points, according to the observation. For instance, pupils were able to comprehend meanings without translation by using hand gestures to demonstrate events and sequence. Feedback was largely given by facial expressions. While modest head tilts and raised eyebrows indicated the need for correction, the teacher's smile and nod encouraged responses. This preserved student confidence and lessened the need for direct verbal reprimand. Students were continually



engaged in interaction through the utilization of eye contact. Quieter kids were encouraged to join by the teacher's intentional eye contact with them. In order to foster a sense of support and involvement, the teacher intentionally moved around the classroom and approached pupils during pair work. Lessons involving active nonverbal communication generally demonstrated higher student participation and fewer clarification requests, indicating improved understanding.

The results imply that in EFL environments, nonverbal communication should be regarded as a fundamental teaching ability. Effective nonverbal behavior training should be a part of teacher education programs so that educators may better understand how their posture, facial expressions, and gestures impact students. Reflective techniques like peer observation and instructional video analysis can assist educators in assessing their nonverbal communication. To increase clarity and engagement, teachers are urged to intentionally match verbal explanations with encouraging nonverbal clues.

The contribution of nonverbal communication from teachers to improving student comprehension and engagement in EFL classes has been discussed in this article. Nonverbal behaviors are crucial tools for managing interactions and constructing meaning, as evidenced by both theoretical discussions and classroom observations. Effective nonverbal communication fills the gap between language input and learner comprehension in EFL circumstances when linguistic limitations may impede communication. Teachers may create learning environments that are more inclusive, motivating, and effective by becoming more conscious of their nonverbal conduct.

References

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