



Students' Responses to Nonverbal Communication in EFL Classroom

Jos Luise Candra¹, Fauzi Miftakh², M. Reza Pahlevi³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang

Abstract

Received: 27 November 2023
Revised: 08 Desember 2023
Accepted: 15 Desember 2023

The objective of this study is to describe various students' responses to teachers' nonverbal communication in the EFL classroom. The study employs descriptive case study as the research method. Conducted in a Vocational High School in Karawang, this research involves three in-service EFL teachers and 75 students of three different classrooms. These three classroom interactions were observed, questionnaires were administered to students, and participants were interviewed. The data is then generalized and analyzed with thematic analysis. This study concluded that five nonverbal types were used by teachers; these five nonverbal types were kinesics, vocalics, oculesics, haptics, and proxemics. And students are responding to each in positive but different ways; kinesics and vocalics are used to prompt participation; oculesics and haptics are used to eliminate distractions; and proxemics were used to promote interaction.

Keywords: *EFL, Nonverbal communication, Students respond*

(*) Corresponding Author: Jaynuada96@gmail.com

How to Cite: Candra, J. L., Miftakh, F., & Pahlevi, M. R. (2023). Students' Responses to Nonverbal Communication in EFL Classroom. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10427533>.

INTRODUCTION

Nonverbal communication is often regarded as a supporting factor to verbal communication and treated as nothing more than rudimentary way to convey messages and communicate. However, nonverbal communication is an essential part of communication (Gantiano, 2020). Without nonverbal cues, communication would be bland, uninteresting, and less impactful (Santiano, 2018). Any effort to separate verbal and nonverbal communication can only be done artificially as the two are so intertwined and naturally complement each other (Knapp, 1972). Moreover, humans naturally look for nonverbal cues when communicating with other humans (Burgoon, Guerrero & Floyd, 2016). With the fact that the nonverbal communication preceding verbal communication and humans automatically looking for nonverbal cues in communication it is clear that nonverbal communication is an important aspect to consider when we discuss interaction between teachers and students in language classrooms.

In the language classroom, nonverbal communication is not often considered as an important study in spite of how important clear communication between teachers and students are in language classroom. Even more so, if we consider that nonverbal language precedes language acquisition (Filippa and Grandjean, 2020). In support of this, EFL teachers have been observed to depend on nonverbal cues to bridge the gap in language abilities between them and their students (Antika and Ikhsan, 2018). There are many ways nonverbal communication can be utilized to support a language classroom. Teachers can use nonverbal communication to aid teaching through instructional language; which covers explanations, asking questions, giving feedback, and giving corrections

(Ranta & Harmawati, 2017). Nurmalasari et. al. (2021) claims that nonverbal communication, in particular kinesics and vocalics, supports the politeness strategy in online-based language classrooms. Nonverbal communication is a powerful tool in teachers' hands when used correctly.

Nonverbal communication consists of many types. Bowman (2020) codifies nonverbal communication into kinesics, proxemics, haptics, oculusics, vocalics, physical appearance, olfactics, chronemics, and environment. Of these, most studies have found that teachers only actively use five of them when teaching, five most used nonverbal types are kinesics; proxemics; haptics; oculusics; and vocalics (Ananda et. al., 2020; Antika & Ikhsan, 2018; Astutik & Purwati, 2021; Pertiwi & Indriani, 2021). Perceptions toward nonverbal communication in the classroom are generally positive. Nematy (2019) performed a survey and found that students prefer teachers who are well dressed, use friendly facial expressions, as well as use their body to illustrate and explain the subject. Azad (2022) also found that there is no difference in perspective that students have on teachers' nonverbal communication; both genders show positive perception towards nonverbal communication in EFL classrooms. Asgher et. al. (2021) found students express that they feel more motivated and interested in the subject whenever the teacher actively looks at them and moves in the classroom.

METHODS

This research employs descriptive case study as the research method. Yin (2017) defines descriptive case study as “a case study whose purpose is to describe a phenomenon (the “case”) in its real-world context.”, matching the intent of this study to describe how students respond to nonverbal communication in EFL classrooms. Participating in this study are 3 in-service teachers and 75 students from a Vocational High School in Karawang; participants are briefed on the research procedure and the purpose of this research. This research observes the classroom interaction of three classrooms, all of which lasts around 80 minutes each, with each classroom being observed twice. At the end of the first observation period students are asked to fill a questionnaire form, and 4 students from each class are interviewed after the second observation. Teacher participants are interviewed after the classroom period ends. Instruments used in this research are from Negi (2009), modified in accordance with DeMonbrun et. al. (2017). The data is first generalized, then processed through thematic analysis to obtain the final interpretation that is presented in the Results and Discussion below.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

Starting with the observation result, observation of the classroom interaction shows that teachers are using all five (5) nonverbal communication types. In the order of the most often used nonverbal cues by teachers are kinesics, oculusics, vocalics, proxemics, and haptics. These nonverbal cues are used by teachers both independently and in-combination with each other. Interviews with teachers reveal that teachers are aware and use these nonverbal cues with a clear intention.

Next, let us consider the general consensus in students' responses to teachers' nonverbal communication by looking at the responses to the questionnaire

that students are asked to fill. The statements in the questionnaire can be categorized based on how students respond to specific nonverbal cues. This table below compiles the responses students given to statements in the questionnaire form. The responses are in a 1-5 Likert-scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree, 3 indicating neither agree nor disagree, and 5 indicating strongly agree. On the right side, there is the average (Mean) and the standard deviance (STDEV) of the data.

Table 1. Questionnaire Responses

No	Statement	Responses					Mean	STDev
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	I pay attention to teachers' expression	1	0	8	43	23	4,16	0,72
2	I prefer teachers who shows more expression	0	1	9	35	30	4,25	0,72
3	I pay attention to teachers gaze	1	3	24	35	12	3,72	0,83
4	When the teacher look at me I feel I have to respond	0	1	27	36	11	3,76	0,71
5	I prefer teachers who maintain eye contact with the whole classroom	1	1	7	43	23	4,15	0,75
6	I pay attention to teachers body and hand movement	1	5	16	43	10	3,75	0,82
7	I prefer teachers who uses more body and hand movement	1	1	14	35	24	4,07	0,83
8	I get distracted by teachers hand movement	24	34	14	2	1	1,96	0,86
9	When teacher points at me, I feel that I have to respond	0	3	10	49	13	3,96	0,69
10	I prefer teacher teach while standing more than sitting down	0	1	30	23	21	3,85	0,85
11	I don't like it when teacher touch me	1	11	53	6	4	3,01	0,71
12	When teacher touch me I feel that I have to respond	2	7	21	40	5	3,52	0,86
13	I like to sit near the teacher	11	23	30	9	2	2,57	0,98
14	Where I sit in the classroom is important to me	1	4	17	36	17	3,85	0,88
15	I pay attention more to the teacher when they move around in the classroom	2	8	25	35	5	3,44	0,87
16	I get distracted when teacher walk around	10	25	33	5	2	2,52	0,91
17	I get distracted when teacher stand too close to me	4	19	33	17	2	2,92	0,90
18	I prefer teacher who speaks with clearer intonation	0	1	5	25	44	4,49	0,69

19	I prefer teacher whose voice is loud and clear	2	12	17	29	15	3,57	1,07
20	I get distracted easily when teachers voice is not loud enough	4	17	26	23	5	3,11	1,01
21	I pay attention to teachers' uniform/clothing	3	11	37	22	2	3,12	0,84
22	I prefer teacher who arrives to the classroom and end the lesson on time	11	9	31	16	8	3,01	1,17
23	I notice it when teacher wears perfume	2	10	42	17	4	3,15	0,82
24	When teacher suddenly stops talking I pay more attention	1	5	22	36	11	3,68	0,86
25	I like it when teacher uses physical objects to help explaining the subject	0	2	5	23	45	4,48	0,74

Analyzing the responses to the questionnaire shown in the table above after observation and interview with students, we can see some general patterns in students' responses to nonverbal cues. First, students do pay attention to teachers' nonverbal cues in the language classroom. Average responses to statements 1, 3, 6, and 15 are generally positive (more than 3), these positive responses mean students' attention is affected by teachers' nonverbal cues. Further interviews with students reveal that they are able to infer teachers' intentions through nonverbal cues despite not actively paying attention to it. Second, students prefer teachers who use nonverbal communication while teaching, no matter what type. Particularly high averages in responses to statements 2, 5, 7, 18, and 19 indicate kinesics, oculesics, and vocalics type nonverbal cues in particular are more preferred by students. Students state that they find teachers who are not using nonverbal cues boring and hard to understand. Third, students feel the immediacy to respond to most nonverbal cues used by teachers. Average responses to statements 4, 9, and 12 are positive, which indicate that students feel the need to respond to nonverbal cues teachers use. Students reported haptics and proxemics in particular elicit more participation and eliminate distraction significantly. Lastly, students do not seem to find any of the nonverbal cues teachers use particularly distracting. Average responses to statements 8, 16, 17, and 20 are generally negative (less than 3), indicating that students are disagreeing with the statements stating that teachers nonverbal cues are distracting. Statement 8 has a remarkably low average in particular with 1.96, this means students do not find teachers' use of hand gestures distracting at all.

Discussion

Nonverbal communication studies so far have succeeded in identifying at least three types of nonverbal communication used by teachers in language classrooms: kinesics, paralanguage, and proxemics (Antika & Ikhsan, 2018; Ananda et. al., 2020). Another study by Indrawan et. al. (2017) even concluded that teachers use as much as five types of nonverbal communication, along with oculesics and haptics to add to the previous three. Consistently, this study also found the same five main types of nonverbal communications. Teachers use

nonverbal communication not just simply to communicate. Ranta & Harmawati (2017) performed a study that highlights the way teachers use nonverbal communication along with instructional language; which covers explanations, asking questions, giving feedback, and giving corrections. Nonverbal communication use in the language classroom also has been shown to be applicable in combination with other strategies. Nurmalasari et. al. (2021) explains that nonverbal communication, in particular kinesics and vocalics, supports the politeness strategy in online-based language classrooms.

Looking at the result through theoretical lenses we can interpret several ways students respond to nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues affect students' attention span and classroom participation, their interaction with both peers and teachers, as well as allowing them to be less distracted and more engaged in the learning.

Students participate and pay more attention when teachers are actively using nonverbal cues

Students are observed to be more active and participate in the learning when teachers use nonverbal communication. This is also replicated in the questionnaire responses that show students generally agree to the statements stating that they pay attention and they prefer when teachers are using nonverbal cues. Other studies also find similar results in students' motivation positively affected by teachers' nonverbal cues (Nemati, 2019; Asgher, 2021; Azad, 2022). Just as there are different types of nonverbal cues used by teachers while teaching, students' responses to them are also just as varied yet positive overall. Of the five main types of nonverbal communication, teachers mainly use kinesics and vocalics to guide and instruct students through the study material.

Bowman (2020) states that humans have adapted to look for kinesics nonverbal cues in communication with other humans. The same applies in the classroom, where kinesics seem to be teachers' main nonverbal cue to use when instructing students. Considering that EFL classrooms have the challenge of students' limited vocabulary and lacking understanding of the language, Astutik & Purwati (2021) observed teachers using kinesics to bridge the language gap. In response to this, students appreciate and prefer teachers who use kinesics while teaching (Ananda et. al., 2020).

Teachers do not speak in a monotone and static volume, they vary their intonation and volume while speaking. Bowman (2020) considers vocalics as the greatest nonverbal communication type to be used in conjunction with verbal communication to create and share meaning. Teachers use this to their advantage to explain the study material and students greatly prefer teachers who speak in clear intonation and audible volume. Nemati (2019) and Asgher et. al. (2021) similarly found that students perceive proper use of vocalics positively. Compounded with the fact that in EFL classroom teachers tend to speak English which is a foreign language to them, vocalics is indispensable to teachers (Antika and Ikhsan, 2018).

Students are less distracted and more engaged in lesson when teacher uses certain nonverbal cues

Although students do not find any nonverbal cues distracting, students' responses to nonverbal cues intended to engage them and lessen distraction are generally positive. Of the five nonverbal cues mentioned, oculistics and haptics in

particular are used by teachers to eliminate distraction and engage students at the same time.

Keeping eye contact is one of the ways teachers make sure students are not distracted and engaged in the classroom. Burgoon et. al. (2021) discuss how oculesics develop from early infancy to coordinate intention and exchanging turns in communication. Disregarding oculesics when teaching is not an option for teachers, this is evident as students do pay attention to teachers' gaze. Students can determine when they need to respond to teachers based on eye contact alone. Asgher et. al. (2021) concluded that by keeping a frequent eye contact, teachers are able to make sure students are attentive and alert. Pertiwi and Indriani (2021) even consider the use of oculesics as disciplinary functions and help teachers to manage a classroom.

Teachers' use of haptics in the EFL classroom are not as frequent as other types of nonverbal communication, hence it is not represented as a pattern on its own in the findings. Haptics tend to serve as teachers' "last option" to bring distracted students back to participate or engage in the learning. Ananda et. al. (2018) explains that teachers are reluctant to use haptics if they do not feel close or have established relationships with students. Bowman (2020) claims that haptics is one of the "more physiologically arousing" nonverbal communication "and therefore incredibly noticeable to the recipient". The same is also true for students; haptics is one of nonverbal communication that students feel must immediately respond to.

Students' interaction with their peer and teachers depend on the nonverbal aspect of communication

Observations repeatedly show how the nonverbal cues presented by teachers and the classroom environment affect how students interact with their peers and teachers. The nonverbal cue that seems to be affecting how the classroom interaction between students and their peers, as well as students and teachers are proxemics. By adjusting their distance from students, teachers can engage students either as a class, as several small groups, or even as individual students. Antika & Ikhsan (2018) also similarly observed teachers interacting with students by approaching them. Additionally, the questionnaire responses reveal that students have preferences in their seating location in the classroom. Supporting this, Nemati (2019) also discovered that students have clear preferences in where they want to sit in the classroom. Further interview reveals that students often describe their preferred seating position not as a specific location in the classroom, but in relation to their classmates. Hall (1996) outlines four perceptual zones of conversational distance; intimate, personal-casual, social-consultative, and public. Choosing who they sat close to indicates students are aware of and actively maintain their perceptual zones of conversational distance, following Hall (1996).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, students respond to most teachers' nonverbal cues in various ways, with each nonverbal cue seemingly suited to different functions and elicit specific responses. Students are observed to be more enthusiastic to participate in the classroom activity and are able to keep a longer attention span when teachers use kinesics and vocalics while teaching. Distracted students also respond well to

oculesics and haptics, although teachers use the latter only if students are particularly distracted. Students' interaction with their peers and teachers in the classroom are hugely affected by proxemics.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Concerning the research, authorship, and publication of this paper, the author(s) reported no potential conflicts of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Authors would like to express gratitude towards the English Education Department and Teacher Training and Education Faculty members of University of Singaperbangsa Karawang, Indonesia.

REFERENCES

- Asgher, T., Ilyas, A., & Rubab, I. (2021). Learners' Perceptions Of Nonverbal Communication Of Esl Teachers. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 9(3), 754–763. <https://doi.org/10.18510/Hssr.2021.9374>
- Ananda, J., Solihat, D., & Suryana, Y. (2020). Nonverbal Communication Performed By Foreign English Teacher. *Indonesian Efl Journal*, 6(2), 175. <https://doi.org/10.25134/Ieflj.V6i2.3424>
- Antika, R., & Ikhsan, M. K. (2018). Teachers' Nonverbal Communication In English Teaching And Learning Process. *Tell-Us Journal*, 4(1), 65–79. <https://doi.org/10.22202/Tus.2018.V4i1.2799>
- Astutik, Y., & Purwati, O. (2021). Verbal And Nonverbal Language: Pre-Service Teachers' Decisiveness In Teyl. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 21(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.17509/Bs_Jpbsp.V21i1.36651
- Bowman, J. M. (2020). *Nonverbal Communication: An Applied Approach*. Sage Publications, Incorporated.
- Burgoon, J. K., Guerrero, L. K., & Floyd, K. (2021). *Nonverbal Communication*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315663425>
- Demonbrun, M., Finelli, C. J., Prince, M. J., Borrego, M., Shekhar, P., Henderson, C., & Waters, C. (2017). Creating An Instrument To Measure Student Response To Instructional Practices. *Journal Of Engineering Education*, 106(2), 273–298. <https://doi.org/10.1002/Jee.20162>
- Filippa, M., & Grandjean, D. (2020). Introduction To The Special Issue On Nonverbal Vocal Communication In Development. *Journal Of Nonverbal Behavior*, 44(4), 391–394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10919-020-00338-Y>
- Gantiano, H. E. (2020). Analisis Dampak Strategi Komunikasi Non Verbal. *Dharma Duta*, 17(2), 80–95. <https://doi.org/10.33363/Dd.V17i2.392>
- Hall, E. T. (1966). *The Hidden Dimension* (2nd Ed.). Anchor/Doubleday.
- Knapp, M. (1972). *Non-Verbal Communication In Human Interaction*. New York: Holt, Rinehart And Winston.
- Knapp, M. L., Hall, J. A., & Horgan, T. G. (2013). *Nonverbal Communication In Human Interaction*. Cengage Learning.
- Indrawan, I., Nitiasih, P., & Piscayanti, K. (2017). An Analysis Of Teachers' Non-Verbal Communication In Efl Classroom At Smp Negeri 3 Banjar. *Prasi*, 12(01). <https://doi.org/10.23887/Prasi.V12i01.13912>

- Nemati, A. (2019). Attitude Of Foreign Language Learners On Nonverbal Communication And Privacy In Communicative Classes. *Vision: Journal For Language And Foreign Language Learning*, 8(1), 11. <https://doi.org/10.21580/Vjv8i13269>
- Negi, J. S. (2009). The Role Of Teachers' Non-Verbal Communication In Efl Classroom. *Journal Of Nelta* Vol. 14 No. 1-2.
- Pertiwi, I. S., & Indriani, L. (2021). Efl Learner's Perspective On The Importance Of Non Verbal Communication Within Classroom Conversation. *English Journal Of Indragiri (Eji): Studies In Education, Literature, And Linguistics*.
- Ranta, R., & Harmawati, D. (2017). Analyzing Teacher's Instructional And Nonverbal Communication In Efl Classroom. *Lingual: Journal Of Language And Culture*, 4(2), 26. <https://doi.org/10.24843/Ljlc.2017.V04.I02.P05>
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case Study Research And Applications: Design And Methods (6th Ed.)*. Sage Publications, Inc.