

Students' Perception of EFL Teachers' Non-verbal communication in understanding in Classrooms

Abdelmjeed. A. H. Musa 1, Mohammed. E. El shingeety 2 (Professor of Applied Linguistics

(Department of English, Faculty of higher studies/ Sudan University of Science and Technology, Sudan)

Abstract: This paper aims to investigate students' perception of EFL teachers' non-verbal communication in understanding in Classrooms. A descriptive method was followed to achieve the purpose of the study, and the theoretical framework has been reviewed as a literature review. Two hypotheses have been formulated for the study. On the light of the hypotheses, a questionnaire for EFL students was designed as a tool for the data collection to test the hypotheses. After analysing the data statistically using the SPSS program, the results reveal that; teachers' non-verbal communication is essential in teaching EFL classes. In addition, the findings show that; non-verbal communication is credible in conveying emotional meaning and helps students understand the emotional related message clearly. Moreover, it has been found out that; teachers' non-verbal communication helps the students to understand the meaning of new vocabulary and some grammatical meaning. On the light of the reviewed literature and the findings, it has been recommended that; teachers should utilize non-verbal communication in their EFL classes to make the students attentive and motivated.

Keywords: body language, gestures, non-verbal communication, gestures

I. Introduction

Meaning conveyance and understanding is a fundamental goal in language teaching and learning. To accomplish this essential goal, effective communication should be mastered in EFL classrooms. It is well known that communication is divided into two forms; verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is considered one of the most effective techniques in meaning conveyance. This paper seeks to address the students' perception of non-verbal communication or body language that is used as a technique to convey the concepts, new vocabulary, structure, and chunk in EFL classes. In classrooms, teachers do not only use translation, explanation, or synonyms and antonyms to impart the meaning of new words and structure, but they also use other techniques related with non-verbal communication such as gestures, eye contact, postures, miming, and body language. This is the central concern of the current study and it intends to measure the efficacy of this technique in facilitating students' understanding or perception of lessons taught in EFL classrooms. As indicated in the abstract, two hypotheses have been set as the study hypotheses and they formulated as follows: 1- Non-verbal communication increases students' motivation to understand meaning. 2- Non-verbal communication is a credible technique to convey emotional meaning.

II. The main usage of non-verbal communication in EFL classes

Whatever activity being conducted in classrooms has an aim. EFL teachers use various kinds of techniques in their classes and each technique has a purpose that suits the target students. In traditional approaches teachers used to focus on other techniques such translation of the words and asking the students to give the opposites of the words. Non-verbal communication technique is considered to be used by the most modern approaches of teaching English language. A recent evidence of using non-verbal communication in classrooms suggest that teachers should pay attention of using nonverbal behaviour in their classroom for three major reasons firstly, to be aware of nonverbal behaviour in order to allow them to become better receivers of students' messages. Secondly, they will become a better sender of signals that reinforce learning. Finally, by using his kind of communication increases the degree of the perceived psychological closeness between teacher and student. According to Afdaliah, (2017, 2) in teaching and learning process, teachers' understanding of NVC is very crucial. Teacher's use of nonverbal behaviour in classrooms can convey several messages and can create

positive or negative classroom atmosphere. For example, teacher's appearance, gesture and posture, face and eye contact, voice, touching and proximity can strengthen the students-teacher relationship and it may further affect the students' motivation and understanding in learning. According to Zeki (as cited in Barabar, A., & Caganaga 2015, 142) teachers usage of nonverbal cues is really advantageous for explaining new things, show our appreciation, getting students' attention and solving classroom management problems. It helps the teachers in solving the problems such as discipline, motivation, participation and also the other problems that breakdown the communication both between the teachers and the students. In research from Malandro et al (as cited in Schroeder 2017, 103) suggests that nonverbal communication can serve six different functions such as complementing, repeating, accenting, contradicting, substituting, and regulating. A detailed explanation will be present of each function of the above in the next paragraphs. These are example in which non-verbal communication can be utilized in EFL classroom and there are more other examples.

2.1 The use of NVC in complementing messages

It is very for the sender of the message to make sure that the receiver of the message does not decode the message incorrectly. In EFL setting, the sender of the message usually the teacher and the receiver is almost most of the time is the students. Nonverbal behaviour serves to complete or add to the verbal message. It can modify or elaborate on verbal messages. Verbal communication alone would not communicate the intended meaning. According to Dwyer (as cited in Rammal, 2007) the receiver should check with the sender the meaning of the nonverbal behaviour if any ambiguous exist. The overall message can be understood by following a four-step process:

- Hear the words.
- See the nonverbal behaviour.
- Check the meaning with the sender when the verbal and nonverbal messages are different.
- Consider the context or setting.

By following the above steps there would not be misunderstanding and interpretation of the teachers' verbal communication. Knapp & Hall (as cited in Peng 2011, 507) outlines it as: when clarification is of the most importance, one should be primarily concerned with making verbal and nonverbal behaviours because they complement one another.

2.2 The use of NVC in repeating messages

People often use nonverbal language to repeat a point in their verbal language. Repetition is used in order to emphasize or clarify the verbal message. For example, when an English teacher is teaching numbers, when s/he says "one" in English, meanwhile, s/he puts one of his/her fingers to clarify the message

2.3 The use of NVC in accenting messages

The function of accenting is to emphasize a particular message in verbal communication. It is much like underlining or italicizing written words to emphasize them. For instance, a skilful teacher would pause before or after an important point in his/her explanation. The pause would assist in highlighting or accenting the point that the teacher is about to make.

2.4 The use of NVC in contradicting messages

According to Negi (2009, 103) Nonverbal communication can contradict verbal messages, as in 'irony' and 'satire'. In a nutshell, nonverbal communication expresses happiness, sadness, surprise, intimacy, seriousness, satire, formality, informality and so on via nonverbal language.

2.5 The use of NVC in substituting messages

Nonverbal communication can also substitute verbal messages. According to Wigham ((2012) some studies have approved that nonverbal communication cues were found to frequently accompany verbal communication rather than be used as a substitute for verbal communication when communicative difficulties arose. In addition to that learners do not rely completely on the nonverbal cues mode when there is ambiguity of the lexical item being conveyed. They rather use verbal communication in association with nonverbal communication cues and that cues are exhibited to display the individual's intentionality onto the words in order to help facilitate understanding by an interlocutor. To sum up, when clarification of any conveyed message is needed, verbal and nonverbal communication should be the primary concern since they complement each other. For example, an experienced teacher might suddenly raise or lower his/her voice to attract absent-minded students to focus on his/her speaking in class. Another example, a quick "thumb up" can substitute for words of praise or encouragement that might not be heard from a distance or in a noisy crowd.

2.6 The use of NVC in regulating messages

Specific nonverbal movements and gestures are used to regulate the follow, the pace, and the back-and-forth nature of verbal communication. According to Capper (2000), nonverbal communication provides vital cues for the learners' interpretation of speech acts and considerably enhances conversation. Allen (1999, 474) puts it as:

In the classroom environment, nonverbal communication plays a crucial role, especially with regard to teachers' nonverbal signals. Teachers may use nonverbal signals to:

- Encourage students to participate in a lesson.
- Motivate them,
- Emphasize expectations,
- Monitor and control students' reactions to the discussed agenda,
- Help to come up with appropriate guess about the message, and
- Raise students' awareness of gestures used in the target language.

III. The role of NCV in students' motivation

It is undeniable that motivation plays a crucial role in learning and as the aphorism goes "You can lead a horse to the pool of water, but you cannot make it drink". From here the importance of motivation appears. Students' motivation and enthusiasm can be reflected in their energy and motive to learn, work effectively and achieve their learning goals. It is not only teachers who use body language to show their enthusiasm as it has been indicated above, but also students use it to show that they are active and have a desire towards learning. This motivation can be observed in the form of students' response to their teachers' instructions during class interaction. For instance, pointing by fingers, eye contact, head and hand waving, for instance, biting lips, holding hands, rubbing the hands, and many more. As Rost (2006) states that of motivation, particularly in EFL settings, is so important that other considerations about teaching methodology seem to pale in comparison. Considering motivation is something essential in teaching language because of the quite facts of learning English for most of the students. Almost all the conditions that we familiar with in contributing to successful second language acquisition are lacking in most EFL contexts: there just isn't sufficient English input in the environment, there probably aren't plenty of chances for communication with English speakers, there usually aren't enough strong role models promoting the learning of English, and there may not be widespread enough social faith for the idea of becoming competent in English. Because of these adverse conditions, a learner has to have extraordinary motivation in order to succeed at learning English! Woolfolk and Brooks (as cited in Negi 2009, 103) claim that non-verbal behavior often effect the interaction of teachers and students. A fact point of the success of both the student and teacher depends upon the valuable communication between them in the class, but communication becomes useless without using non-verbal behaviors appropriately. Negi (2009, 103) indicates that there are positive and negative results of students' perception of their teachers' nonverbal communication. He points out that, 1- Students were highly motivated to the teachers who smiled at them, made them laugh in the classroom, and illustrated the subject matter but felt difficulties to deal with the teacher who stared at them coldly and indicated a particular student with their raised finger. 2- Students became more active if the teacher kept movements in the classroom and made the frequent eye contact with them.

IV. Using Body Language as a Tool for Expressing feelings and Emotions

In learning a foreign language, there are a plethora of inspirational words that need to be conveyed to the learners. The learners need to know the exact meaning of those words and use them in practical life, but without proper usage of body language, the meaning of the emotional words will never be conveyed accurately. Teachers need to employ and act the target feelings of the words to their students. According to Posner, J., Russell, J. A., & Peterson, B. S. (2005, 716), the emotional meaning of words begins from pleasant to unpleasant and goes along to activation and deactivation. It has been put in the following figure:

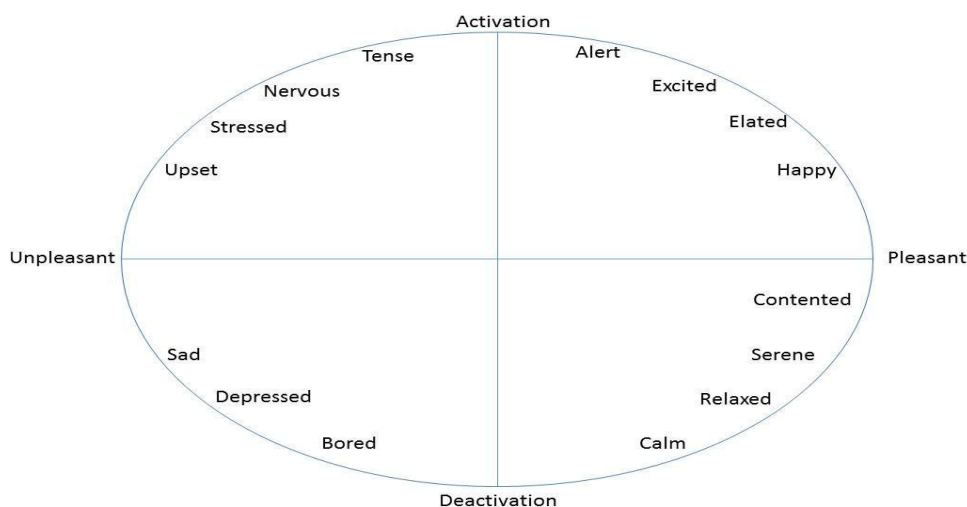


Figure (1): A graphical representation of the circumplex model of affect with the horizontal axis representing the valence dimension and the vertical axis representing the arousal or activation dimension.

The number of basic emotions proposed varies from author to author but is generally assumed not to exceed 15. The circumplex model proposed by Russell uses two orthogonal dimensions: valence (pleasantness) and arousal (activation); the standard emotions as identified by Russell lie on the circle in this space (see the above figure). Teachers should know the appropriate body language clue that suits the intended emotional word during their teaching process from the above-stated facts about emotions. EFL teachers can utilize all of these described body motions and postures and act them when needed in their classes. For example, a teacher can smile to show the meaning of happiness and pleasure. S/he can be in a state of careful watching and readiness to convey the emotion of alert, or s/he can make different motions such as touching or rubbing the neck, rubbing earlobe, rubbing the legs and chewing lips to indicate the feeling of nervous and so forth for the rest of the emotional models.

V. Gestures

A gesture is a kind of body language, which is the most helpful tool for communication. English language teachers use gestures accompanied by spoken words to explain new words and express the meaning. For example, when teachers want to explain the pronoun "I", simply they point to themselves using gestures; when they want to describe an object, they frequently use gestures to illustrate what the object is like. The students find it easier to understand what their teachers say when they let their body create a picture of the object rather than relying on the spoken words alone. If they describe a round object like a ball, for instance, they may hold their hands in front of themselves with their fingers arched upward and their thumbs pointing down. Because some students are visual, they take information more effectively by seeing what is being described. Another example, the word "bouncy" the teacher can act out the action word to convey the word's meaning. Illustrating teachers' messages through gestures helps students to get the whole meaning of the new vocabulary.

VI. Discussion

This section discusses the analysis of the students' questionnaire which has been indicated earlier the introduction section. Upon the two hypotheses that has been formulate, the students' questionnaire has been designed as follows:

- 1- Strongly agree (SA)
- 2- agree (A)
- 3- Undecided (ND)
- 4- disagree (DA)
- 5- strongly disagree (SD)

NO	Part one	SA	A	ND	DA	SD
1	Teacher's body language makes me attentive in the class.					
2	I recognize teacher's response from his eye contact.					
3	Teacher's eye contact makes the lesson enjoyable.					
4	I feel more confident when the teacher uses positive eye contact.					
5	When the teacher sits on the chair, I feel unmotivated and get bored.					
No	Part two	SA	A	ND	DA	SD
1	I understand the feeling of surprise in a clear way when the teacher explains it through facial expression.					
2	I understand the meaning of sadness in a clear way when the teacher explains it through facial expressions.					
3	I get the intended message clearly when the teacher uses variety of voice.					
4	I get the meaning of tiredness in an accurate way if the teacher uses body language.					

Table (1) the Frequency and Percentage of Students' Questionnaire by Sex

sex	Frequencies	Percentage
Male	46	46.0%
Female	54	54.0%
Total	100	100.0%

Source: IBM SPSS 24 package

The above table illustrates the distribution of the participants by sex sample by male (%46.0) and female by (%54.0).

Table (2) The Frequency and Percentage of the Items in Hypothesis one of Students' Questionnaire (Non-verbal Communication Increases Students' Motivation to Understand Meaning)

No	Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Teacher's body language makes me attentive in the class	71	24	4	1	0
		71.0	24.0	4.0	1.0	0.0
2	I recognize teacher's response from his eye contact	58	35	6	1	0
		58.0	35.0	6.0	1.0	0.0
3	Teacher's eye contact makes the lesson enjoyable	60	29	6	5	0
		60.0	29.0	6.0	5.0	0.0
4	I feel more confident when the teacher uses positive eye contact	53	29	12	5	1
		53.0	29.0	12.0	5.0	1.0
5	When the teacher sits on the chair, I feel unmotivated and get bored	39	18	20	15	8
		39.0	18.0	20.0	15.0	8.0

Source: IBM SPSS 24 package

The above table shows the distributions of the percentages and frequencies of the hypothesis one of the students' questionnaire. As it can be noticed that most students become attentive in the class when the teacher uses body language by the percentage of (71.0 %) strongly agree. This indicates that choosing this option strongly serves the suggested hypothesis. On the other hand, (24.0%) of them agree, while (4.0%) undecided and only (1.0%) of the respondents disagree with the statement. No one responds with the last option, "strongly disagree" (0.0%).

The frequency of the second item states that the students recognize the teacher's response from his eye contact. (58.0%) of the respondents strongly agree with the statement, and (35.0%) agree. However, (6.0%) did not decide, and only (1.0%) strongly disagree with the mentioned item.

The third item states that the teacher's eye contact makes the lesson enjoyable. More than half of the respondent strongly agree with the statement by (60.0%) and (29.0%) agree while (6.0%) undecided. On the other hand, (5.0%) disagree, and (0.0%) strongly disagree.

Fifty-three per cent of the participants strongly agree with the suggested item. While (29.0%) agree with that. On the other hand, (12.0) undecided and (5.0%) disagree. However, there is only (1.0%).

The last item of the hypothesis addresses that a student feels unmotivated and gets bored when the teacher sits on the chair (39.0%) of the respondents strongly agree with that while (18.0%) agree and (20.0%) undecided. However, (15.0%) disagree. Yet, there is one per cent strongly disagree.

According to the above percentages and the frequencies of the items, it can be seen that all the possible options which have been chosen serve the suggested hypothesis.

Table (3) The Frequency and Percentage of the Items in Hypothesis Two of Students' Questionnaire (Non-verbal Communication is Credible Technique to Convey Emotional Meaning).

No	Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I understand the feeling of surprise in a clear way when the teacher explains it through facial expression	56	32	10	2	0
		56.0	32.0	10.0	2.0	0.0
2	I understand the meaning of sadness in a clear way when the teacher explains it through facial expressions	50	35	12	3	0
		50.0	35.0	12.0	3.0	0.0
3	I get the intended message clearly when the teacher uses varieties of voice	66	26	6	2	0
		66.0	26.0	6.0	2.0	0.0
4	I get the meaning of tiredness in an accurate way if the teacher uses body language	55	27	14	4	0
		55.0	27.0	14.0	4.0	0.0

Source: IBM SPSS 24 package

The above table highlights the frequency and the percentages of the items in hypothesis two. As it can be noted that (56.0%) of the respondents strongly agree with the first item and that indicates using facial expressions credibly convey the meaning of emotional words, and thirty-two per cent of the respondents agree with the suggested item. While (10.0%) undecided. However (2.0%) disagree with that, and (0.0%) strongly disagree.

Fifty per cent of the respondents strongly agree with the second item which suggest that the meaning of sadness is clearly understood when the teacher explains it through facial expressions. On the other hand (35.0%) agree and (12.0%) undecided while (3.0%) disagree. Yet, there is (0.0%) strongly disagree.

The third item, which has the highest percentage of the option (strongly agree) (66.0%) of the respondents strongly agree that they get the intended message clearly when the teacher uses various voices. In comparison (26.0%) agree and (6.0%) undecided. However, (2.0%) disagree and (0.0%) strongly disagree.

Finally, (55.0%) of the respondents strongly agree with item four which proposes that the meaning of tiredness is accurately understood if the teacher uses body language and (27.0%) agree. While (14.0%) undecided and (4.0%) disagree. Yet, there is (0.0%) strongly disagree.

Based on the above distribution and the frequency of the percentage, most of the selected options support the underling hypothesis.

VII. Findings

Based on review of the related literature in chapter two and the analysis of the data in chapter four, the following points have been found:

- 1- Teachers' non-verbal communication is important in teaching EFL classes and it could help students to be attentive, recognize teacher's respond, make the lesson enjoyable, and builds students' confidence.
- 2- Non-verbal communication is credible in conveying emotional meaning and it could help students to get the emotional related messages in a clear way.
- 3- Teachers' non-verbal is helpful in conveying and clarifying the meaning of new vocabulary such as shapes, sizes, direction- related words.

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