

NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE APPLICATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW STUDY

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Abstract

The weight of non-verbal language application is strongly believed to significantly offer several benefits to language teaching and learning. This paper is a critical and systematic analysis of available literature on the application of non-verbal language in the English classroom context. Specifically, it investigates common types of non-verbal language used in the English classroom. In addition, the paper focuses on highlighting the effects of non-verbal language on teachers and students in terms of knowledge transferring and understanding, teaching and learning motivation and language communication. Finally, it looks into some rules and techniques to implement non-verbal language in the educational context. The research findings provide a comprehensive overview of the application of non-verbal language in order to enrich teachers' teaching experience, boost up the students' performance as well as competence, improve learning outcomes, and increase the quality of language teaching and learning.

Keywords: *Language teaching and learning, non-verbal language, rules and techniques.*

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VẬN DỤNG NGÔN NGỮ ĐIỀU BỘ TRONG QUÁ TRÌNH DẠY VÀ HỌC TIẾNG ANH: NGHIÊN CỨU TỔNG QUAN

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Tóm tắt

Việc cân nhắc ứng dụng ngôn ngữ điều bộ trong quá trình dạy và học sẽ mang đến nhiều lợi ích thiết thực cho học sinh và giáo viên. Bài viết này tập trung vào sự bình luận tổng thể và phân tích hệ thống giá trị tổng quan sẵn có về ngôn ngữ điều bộ trong bối cảnh lớp học. Đặc biệt là tập trung nghiên cứu các loại hình phổ biến của sự chuyển động cơ thể được sử dụng trong lớp học tiếng Anh. Bên cạnh đó, bài viết cũng tập trung vào các điểm mấu chốt của sự ảnh hưởng ngôn ngữ điều bộ đối với giáo viên và người học trên phương diện truyền tải và hiểu tri thức, động lực dạy và học và môi trường giao tiếp. Sau cùng, nghiên cứu tìm hiểu các quy tắc và kỹ thuật ứng dụng ngôn ngữ điều bộ trong bối cảnh giáo dục. Kết quả nghiên cứu có thể đưa ra một cái nhìn tổng thể về việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ để làm phong phú thêm kinh nghiệm giảng dạy, đồng thời nâng cao năng lực người học, cải thiện thành quả học tập và nâng cao chất lượng dạy và học.

Từ khóa: Các quy tắc và thủ thuật, dạy và học ngôn ngữ, ngôn ngữ điều bộ.

1. Introduction

Communication is done through both verbal and nonverbal means and mode of conveyances (Mehrabian, 1971), and for this reason, successful communication requires communicators to be competent not only in verbal but also in nonverbal ways (Nguyen, 2015). Emphasizing the importance of nonverbal communication, Bull (2001) argues that without the proper use of this type of language, classroom expressions can get broken easily. In the same vein, Steele (2010) points out “Non-verbal communication is a key factor in effective teaching and learning for all subject areas of educational context” (p.71). No more doubts, taking integrated approaches in implementing body language into the curriculum and classroom practice will help maximize the potential benefits to enhance the students’ and teachers’ motivation in teaching and learning process. Supporting teachers and students is at the heart of the realization of the potential benefits of body language for individual motivations, desires, wants, interests in language teaching and learning. Non-verbal language is also considered as an integral part of daily classroom due to its nature to show emotion and feelings (Harmer, 2001). In the classroom, with non-verbal language (NVL) used appropriately by teachers, it will attract students’ attention, increase their engagement, and help them gain accurate understanding of language contents (Kumar, 2018).

It is obvious that either non-verbal communication or language in mind or silent interaction used as a keynoted role in teachers’ and students’ daily communicative transmission, and an inseparable part in the syllabus of ESL/EFL teaching and learning (Azeez & Azeez, 2018). However, there has been little attention given to practical teaching techniques to incorporate body language into their classrooms. This paper will mainly focus on common types of body movements used in intake environments (e.g., within oral language teaching and learning) and then highlighting the NVL effects for teachers and students. Also, it provides an overall insight into the rules and techniques to implement non-verbal language in the educational context.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of non-verbal language

There are different ways to define the term

non-verbal language. This term is normally equated with that of non-verbal communication, or considered as the silent way of communication without words (Abdulrahman et al., 2022). Be that as it may, NVL is sometimes called body language or language underlying targeted performance, such a language covers unconscious and subconscious aspects of communication (Merriam-Webster, 2024). However, according to Hişmanoglu and Hişmanoglu (2008), NVL is only a part of a whole range of nonverbal communication. Actually, body language is considered as a way of communication in which the communicator uses the body parts rather than by words (Hornby, 2006). It includes many non-verbal behaviors such as eye contact, gestures, postures, facial gestures, touch, and so on (Tai, 2014). Otherwise, only those movements, postures or facial expressions used in social intercourse to show emotions, attitudes, and other information can be called body language (Yin, 2014). Non-verbal or body language can, therefore, be understood as a kind of language using a graphic symbol system formed by facial and body gestures and body movement to convey non-oral meanings closely attached to its speakers towards the specific context.

2.2. Classification of non-verbal language

Non-verbal language is categorized based on its property used in the pedagogical settings, the state of the participator in social intercourse, its functions or the occasion where it is used (Yin, 2014). Nevertheless, looking into the properties of NVL is more common for proper use in the context of language teaching and learning. From this perspective, Tai (2014) believes that body language underlies within nonverbal phenomena consisting of five components, namely gestures, postures, proxemics, haptics, and oculosics. These components will be briefly discussed in details in this paper as under:

Gestures: it implies to movements of the parts of the body like head, eye raising, face, hands, arms, and even legs to convey specific messages to communicative contribution. In the study conducted by Steele (2010), the term “gestures” is derived from wordy concept of “physical co-verbal behavior”, which seems to be deemed for naturally unconscious reactions (normally transmitting messages to a

partner with acts more than speech) occurring in oral communication with a purpose to qualify the value of conversation and to support a combination of movements of fingers, hands, head, shoulders, and some certain body parts accompanying with both visual and non-visual components like: sounds, words, mood, emotion and others.

Postures: it refers to the position of the body (Tai, 2014). Posture can signal whether or not people are paying attention, the degree of status in the encounter, and even how much they like or dislike each other. It is also culture-specific as is the case with other categories of body language. For instance, in some cultures, talking with teachers with hands in pocket or sitting with legs crossed in front of the teacher in the classroom may be interpreted as inappropriate or disrespectful.

Proxemics conceptualizes an appropriate space given in a certain situation when oral speech interacts between teacher and students. It is also called a rapport distance in communication. Steele (2010) posited that “proxemics includes space and distance where teacher and learners master comforts to enhance their learning and teaching” (p.72). In another version, proxemics reflects the nature of interpersonal distance: How closely or how far is it for teachers and students to keep them from their partner(s) appropriately? In fact, interpersonal distance remains the prolonged influence on teacher-students effective interaction. In the theory of learning, interpersonal distance underlies understanding people, leading others, organizing, communicating, manipulating, and meditating conflicts.

Haptics describes patterns of tactile communication (i.e., touching). Touching is communicating affection, compliance, aggression, sexual interest, or support; announcing a response; and getting attention. Tai (2014) argues that language teachers who teach a foreign language to students from cultures different from their own should be very careful when using a body language category like haptics. Actually, touching in some cultures including Vietnam is considered as abnormal, especially, when it occurs between gender and age.

Oculesics deals with eye behaviors as an element of non-verbal communication (Jandt, 2001). It analyzes communication through the eyes,

including eye gaze, eye contact, or eye movement. Pratolo (2019) strongly believes that eye behaviour in communication can control interaction, draw the others’ attention, and show interest or even boredom. Knapp and Hall (1992) refer to the functions of oculusics as regulating the flow of conversation, monitoring feedback, reflecting cognitive activity, expressing emotion, and communicating the nature of an interpersonal relationship. In classrooms, teachers and students normally use eyes to exchange information. For example, students who do not know the answer for sure, may look anywhere to seek for help, and teachers can use eyes to foster students’ confidence or encourage their answers.

Gestures, postures, proxemics, haptics, and oculusics are integral parts of any communication where teacher and student are in the classroom together, all work together with beyond words to create meaning, both in encoding and decoding messages. Proper use of these components are strongly believed to aid teaching and learning during the lesson. Purposefully, they help teachers and students get across what they want to say, to communicate or simply like to convey not only to pick up supportive signals or information but also in order to acquire the language.

3. Methodology

A systematic review is a reliable research method which can identify, evaluate and interpret available research literature on a certain topic to look for the answer to a research question (Mallett et al., 2012). This method is employed in this study to find out the effects of non-verbal language use and effective ways for its application in the English classroom. The research results can enrich teachers’ teaching experience, boost up the students’ competence, performance, and then improve learning outcomes, and more or less, increase the quality of language teaching and learning.

For the latest review, the research targets papers published in academic journals or proceedings of the international conferences that have been published in the range of twenty years from 2004 to 2024. Thirteen papers are selected from the results of Google Scholar, AI (i.e., [www.research rabbit.ai](http://www.researchrabbit.ai)) searching engine for the review in order to reach the research objectives.

4. Findings

4.1. The effects of using body language in language classroom

Abdulrahman et al. (2022) relay that proper use or understanding of NVL can foster good teaching and learning as well as enhance good relationships between teachers and students. The NVL benefits in language classrooms can be seen with a series of stream like this. First, body language can help to make the meaning of words clear. It is really effective in reducing teacher talking time and boost understanding (Kumar, 2018). Next, it can establish a more natural communication in the classroom (Tai, 2014). Then, another benefit of using body language in language classrooms is making students more motivated and enthusiastic to the lesson (Istiqamah et al., 2023). Finally, when looking at the teacher's confident, friendly and sincere face, students can feel motivated to study and vice versa, looking at students' NVL like postures, eye contact or facial expression, the teacher can get a part of understanding of their feedback, boredom, or understanding to make suitable adjustment to the lessons (Yang, 2017).

Non-verbal language can promote the sound development of teacher-student interaction, one to one or one to twos or multi-forms. However, Abdulrahman et al. (2022) also indicate its negative impacts if teacher uses NVL improperly. Actually, too much body movement during the lesson may distract the students. Furthermore, it can create the destruction of the classroom atmosphere, or make the knowledge transfer incorrect. In addition, it can damage the professional image of teacher and mislead students' behaviors or psychology and personality, which can result in more serious consequences.

4.2. Ways to maximize non-verbal language in language classroom

4.2.1 Rules for NVL use in language classrooms

Non-verbal language is strongly believed to be very important in terms of regulating the classroom atmosphere, improving the teacher-student relationship, and raising the teaching effect. Yang (2017) states three rules for using non-verbal language effectively. First, in language classes, teachers should use NVL, and encourage students to use it to help communicate at the proper time. Besides, the use of this mode of language should be

natural. The use of NVL plays the effect of silence or facilitates understanding of verbal communication. So, teacher NVL should be natural and harmonious to foster communication in the classroom as well as to create a good image of the teacher on students' mind. Another important issue is that NVL should be clear and adequate. Teachers should also pay attention to clarity and to go on keeping consistency when using body language. Otherwise, the communication between teachers and students will get confused, and it is difficult for students to follow up the conversation.

Interpreting the meanings of non-verbal language in face-to-face communication is also very important to avoid misunderstanding. To read body language accurately, and to understand well how well it conveys the meaning, body language can only be read in contexts and clusters (Altun, 2019). Everyone, not only teachers but also students must mutually respect, and understand the partner's cultural differences and sensitivities, and put the body language in relation to the time, or situation it is used and the interlocutors' culture (speech act). All subjects involved should always listen patiently and understand actively to have a good connection as expected. In addition, because many gestures occur at the same time, they should not be read separately. Reading body language makes teachers be good observers, more aware of people's mentalities and personalities, and improve the relationships with others (Pease & Pease, 2006).

4.2.2. Techniques for body language use in language classrooms

a. The use of gestures

Non-verbal behaviors like facial expressions and hand movements have significant roles in language teaching. According to Yang (2017), a smile can give teachers or students a feeling of pleasure, trust, friendliness, interest, excitement, or surprise while a frown can be a signal of displeasure, disapproval, or anger. Normally, in language classrooms, teachers' natural smile can create a pleasant atmosphere, express teachers' love or empathy, release the students' pressure and help students create optimistic mind. Therefore, it becomes an integral part of the lesson. Besides, hand movements are also very useful in language teaching and learning. Actually, when students' vocabulary knowledge is limited, teachers'

use of gestures can help to express the meanings of words concisely and comprehensively. For example, the teacher points to himself or herself, and says “I”, and points to a female student saying “she”, these gestures can foster students’ understanding of the pronouns easily. In her paper, Tai (2014) mentions some examples of the effective use of gestures in English teaching. For instance, a teacher may stretch out one hand which points to himself with his palm, then beckon to express the meaning of “Come here.” Proper use of gestures can facilitate language teaching and learning. However, too many gestures or too fussy gestures can distract students’ attention.

b. The use of postures

Postures have their own meanings and need to be employed and interpreted suitably. Teachers’ standing tall can show their confidence and tell students that they are maintaining control in the classroom. Altun’s advice is that the teacher should take a firm position while standing because this stance makes the teacher more confident and powerful. Teacher’s head tilting slightly to one side in the conversation with students shows that he or she is listening to the students with sympathetic interest (Miller, 2005).

Understanding students’ postures can give teachers more feedback about the teaching and learning process. For Pratolo (2019), students’ attention can be recognized through their sitting predominantly erect and leaning forward slightly toward the teacher. However, teachers can know that a student is discouraged or bored when he or she is slumping or slouching while sitting.

c. The use of proxemics

Different distancing in language classrooms has different meanings, and gives students different feelings. In her paper, Tai (2014) states when teachers keep two to three point five meters far from the students, they can produce one kind of control. Therefore, when the teacher goes nearby to the students’ “space zone”, this can help to change their absent-minded condition, and get more concentration on the lesson. In addition, teachers’ walking properly in the classroom can also help to draw students’ attention. In language classrooms, getting closer to the students is a way for teachers to control students’ discipline and correct their wrong pronunciation properly. In contrast, a distance of four

to five meters far from students makes it hard to draw their attentions.

Pratolo (2019) argues that not only teachers can have a certain purpose when choosing to keep distancing or make physical arrangement in the class, students can also have their own reason in spacing. Breed and Colaiuta’s study (2006) found that students’ seating choices and their academic performance have a positive correlation. Students voluntarily sitting in the center of the classroom tend to be more attentive and have better academic performance. Their choices to keep their distance from their teacher can also indicate their confidence level. Actually, “the closer the distance to the teacher they voluntarily choose, the more they are confident” (Pratolo, 2019, p.126).

d. The use of haptics

The term haptics mainly refers to touching. This kind of body language can be interpreted differently in different cultural situations. According to Pratolo (2019), some researchers like Miller (1988), Neil and Caswell (1993), and Thompson (1973) believe that appropriate student-teacher touching in the classroom can have positive effects. For example, teachers’ gentle tapping on students’ shoulders can be interpreted as a signal of encouragement. However, he also recognizes that this behavior may have some potentials to be misinterpreted. Different sex touching, even shaking hand, is not allowed among people with Islamic background. Therefore, teachers should be careful and may find other ways to show their encouragement or appreciation of the good performance of different sex students.

e. The use of oculosics

Eyes are normally seen as the window of souls. Therefore, eye contact in language teaching and learning can be a way to show interest, confidence or comprehension (Pratolo, 2019). He believes that a low level of eye contact with students in language classrooms can indicate teachers’ lack of confidence, and this can make the students feel insecure. Similarly, Ekman and Friesen (1969) found that students who avoid teachers’ eye contact lack interest in the lesson, or do not have confidence to answer the question. A study by Zeki (2009) indicates that there is a positive correlation between the amount of student eye contact with the teacher with the level of student comprehension.

Looking at students' eyes can give teachers feedback about their learning process. It can also be a way for teachers to show a positive relationship with their students (Koprulu, 2014). Pratolo's (2019) advice for teachers is that maintaining eye contact with students in the classroom is necessary to catch their feelings, attitudes, and problems; to show their interest in the students, or their confidence in teaching, to attract students' focus as well as interest in the lesson, and to help students release stress and feel motivated. However, too much eye contact can be considered disrespectful or threatening (Altun, 2019). Furthermore, oculosics is culture-specific; therefore, "whether making eye contact with another person is appropriate or not is based on the culture within which is used" (Hişmanoglu & Hişmanoglu, 2008, p. 170). According to their views, in American and Arabic cultures, prolonged eye contact can show interests or truthfulness while people in Japanese, African or Korean cultures consider prolonged eye contact as an impolite nonverbal behavior. In these cases, teachers' roles are not only to be aware of cross-cultural differences in the interpretations of non-verbal behaviors, but also to raise the students' awareness of these features to avoid deficiency in performance or misunderstanding in classroom.

5. Conclusion

The application of NVL is an integral part of any conversation in classrooms because it can help teachers get across what they want to say, convey the supportive messages, and enhance teaching and learning effectiveness (Gower et al., 1983). However, incorrect NVL interpreting can cause adverse effects. So teacher should use this mode of communication carefully and clearly to promote learning and teaching process, most importantly, students will harvest the best benefits from teacher's intentional use.

Proper NVL use and sensitivity or understanding towards students' way of responding through the non-verbal way of communication have a significant role in the field of language teaching and learning. Teachers are encouraged to appropriately use and interpret no verbal or body language such as gestures, postures, eye contact,... to help students free anxieties, fears, tensions arousing during learning and learning pressures as well as mindfully mediate students, closely gap teacher's and students' rapport

and give the classroom the warmth of classroom atmosphere and psychological atmosphere teachers and students created.

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