

## **Policy Brief**

### **Teachers' Non Verbal Behavior and its Effect on Student Motivation and Achievement in Language Classes. The Case of Kotebe University of Education**

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#### **Executive Summary**

Stating the importance of the learning contexts, the cognitive psychologist, Robert Sternberg (1984) cited in Williams & Burden (1997) has argued convincingly that we cannot judge the intellectual quality of any behavioral act outside of the context in which it occurs. Sharing the experience of the Hungarian context, Dornyei (2005) underlined that the importance of the classroom climate as a motivational tool was rank ordered second (after the teacher's own behavior) amongst all the motivational dimensions. Driscoll (2005) on his part stated that one of the important characteristics distinguishing Vygotsky's theory from the theories of other developmentalists is his premise that 'individual development cannot be understood without reference to the social milieu in which the individual is embedded'. For Vygotsky, the social factor is felt to be an important factor in educational achievement. The cognitive faculty and the psychological strength or stability of learners are determined by the specific social factors in which they belong. That is why, Vygotsky's theoretical framework claims that higher mental processes in the individual have their origin in social processes (Driscoll, 2005). In the Ethiopia context, Abate (1996), Gebeyehu (2005) and Bekalu (2017) also noted that learners learn better in a supportive and non-threatening situation. Worde (2003) emphasized that a relaxed classroom environment is paramount in reducing anxiety. For Finch (2001), learning occurs most effectively in a learning environment in which the teacher is a learning resource rather than a controller of learning.

Teacher interaction is at the heart of the teaching learning process and it speeds up learning. In the countless interactions that teachers make with students, teachers should be easy to talk to students and motivate the process of language learning. This is because success in learning was no longer attributed to natural intellect alone, but to a set of psychological forces driving an individual to achieve success (Hegarty, 2010). At the same time, there was also the recognition that some students who were obviously intelligent were not reaching attainable levels of

performance (Hegarty, 2010) due to psychological, social and emotional barriers. In view of this, Hsu (2010) suggested that teachers should be more sensitive in their English classrooms, knowing that their nonverbal immediacy behaviors could bring a positive influence enhancing students' motivation.

Thus, the present study attempted to explore the features of non-verbal behaviors of teachers and its effect on the motivation and achievement of students. To this end, the study employed a Likert-type scale to measure students' and teachers' perceptions of nonverbal behaviors, student motivation, and the effects of these behaviors on students' achievement. The findings revealed that nonverbal communication has the potential to motivate students and positively affects their academic performance.

## **2. Introduction**

Educators, psychologists, anthropologist and sociologists define body language or nonverbal behavior as communication without words. In the classroom situation, teachers made the learning environment active through non-verbal communication (Butt, 2011). The absence of non-verbal communication debases the quality of interaction and this drags the motivation of students out of the right track. That is, non-verbal communication can be an important source of motivation and concentration for students' learning as well as a tool for taking and maintaining attention (Zekia 2009). Students can lose interest and attention in the teaching-learning process due to the lack of non-verbal communication (Butt, 2011).

Nonverbal behavior gives a significant positive effect on the achievement of students (Sutiyatno, 2018). Owing to this, teachers are recommended to be aware of the importance of the nonverbal behavior and use it in favor of students to create a more motivating, comfortable, confident environment in class for a better classroom management (Zekia 2009). It is well-known that learning is collaborative and social; thus, desirable teacher-student contact in the classroom undoubtedly improves student motivation in the business of learning and this deepens their understanding. In the countless interactions teachers have with students, they need to be humble and approachable so that students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns. This is because teachers' nonverbal immediacy behaviors are associated positively and significantly with students' motivation (Hsu, 2010). Pleasant non-verbal behavior of teachers brings a new sense of energy and enthusiasm on the part of the students and this is an asset for academic success. Teachers have to expand the comfort zone of the students by fostering rich positive non-verbal behavior so as to make students exploit the full extent of their potential.

Nonverbal communication includes overt behaviors such as facial expressions, eye contact, touching, dress, postures, spatial distance, tone of voice, a head nod to indicate 'yes', pat on shoulder to show 'intimacy' and so on (Sutiyatno,2018). Similarly, Castro et al. (2014) classified non-verbal behaviors as paralanguage, kinesics, proxemics, physical characteristics, factors of the environment and tacesics. Regarding people's understanding for non-verbal communication,

Sutiyatno (2018) stated that people are not aware of the fact that besides their verbal communication the nonverbal gestures also transmit a powerful message and it is much reliable and effective in comparison to verbal communication.

The present study noted that the learning environment plays a significant role in influencing students' emotions, motivation, and success in learning. According to the study, a teacher's facial expressions serve as a useful tool for managing interactions, helping students respond appropriately and even substituting for verbal language in some situations. Facial expressions help individuals open and close channels of communication. Nonverbal communication offers several advantages in the educational environment. In the classroom setting, it promotes effective interaction, enhances comprehension, and contributes to efficient classroom management.

### 3. Policy Problems

The study emphasizes the importance of a supportive and non-threatening learning environment in promoting students' motivation and academic achievement. Scholars such as Sternberg (1984) cited in Williams & Burden (1997), Vygotsky cited in Driscoll (2005), and Dornyei (2005) argue that learning is strongly influenced by social interaction, classroom climate, and teacher behavior. A positive classroom conditions, friendly teacher-student relationships, and emotional support help reduce anxiety, improve confidence, and encourage effective learning. Teachers are therefore expected to create warm, respectful, and interactive classrooms where students feel psychologically secure and motivated to participate.

The findings also highlight the significant role of teachers' non-verbal communication, including facial expressions, gestures, body language, and proximity, in enhancing students' motivation and learning outcomes, especially in English language classrooms. Research findings show that healthy interpersonal relationships and positive non-verbal behaviors can improve communication and student achievement, while poor teacher-student rapport may negatively affect performance. Since little research has been conducted on the impact of teachers' non-verbal behavior in the Ethiopian context, the study aims to explore how teachers' non-verbal communication influences students' motivation and academic success. It was noted that non-verbal behaviors of teachers has tremendous effects on students. Thus, there is a need to include nonverbal communication topics in the curriculum and instructional materials, and teachers need to be made aware of the importance and effects of nonverbal communication in educational contexts.

### 4. Opportunities of Teachers' Non Verbal Behavior

Opportunities	Descriptions	Supported by
Non-verbal communication has effects on the achievement of students.	Non-verbal communication can influence achievement in English	Sukris Sutiyatno(2018).
Non-verbal	Nonverbal communication can help the learners both to	Sukris

behavior is also relevant as communicative strategy.	understand the foreign language and to express themselves in it. Lacking knowledge of vocabulary or not being able to produce speech can be compensated for by the decoding of nonverbal signals or by transmission of part of the communicative intention to the gesture modality.	Sutiyatno(2018).
Encourage learning process	Teachers' bodily gestures such as movements in the classroom and frequent eye contact with them contribute to relaxing atmosphere that encourage learning process and classroom interaction. Students show greater participation to teachers that smile, display facial expressions while delivering instructions.	Hema Vanita Kesevan, Noor Alhusna Madzlan, Haslinda Hashim (2020).

### 5. Challenges of Teachers' Non Verbal Behavior

Challenges	Descriptions	Supported by
Words and body languages can sometimes convey opposite meanings.	Next, verbal and nonverbal communication messages may conflict with each other; positive word choices can be contradicted by negative nonverbal communication	York, Dustin (2014)
Cultural differences in non-verbal communication create miscommunication	For example, in North American culture, eye contact is commonly viewed as a sign of trust, confidence, respect, and attentiveness. In classroom settings, teachers often expect students to look directly at them and maintain eye contact when asking or answering questions. However, in some Asian cultures, this behavior may be considered disrespectful, as avoiding direct eye contact is often associated with politeness and respect toward authority figures.	Guesnon, Elaine Marie(1993); Gregersen, T. S. (2022).
It is expressed unconsciously	Mostly teachers are unconsciously using their body parts and give gestures	Sukris Sutiyatno(2018)

### 6. Policy Recommendations

Policy Options	Key Actions	Pros	Cons
Including non-verbal communication topics in the curriculum	Incorporate practical activities in the training materials of teachers	Develop teachers' non-verbal communication skills	It requires massive training
Distinguishing and incorporating culturally sensitive non-verbal	Giving insights for teachers about cultural differences	Prevent misunderstanding and miscommunication	Cultural differences on non-verbal communication might lead to

communication in the texts			misunderstanding
Training teachers to create non-threatening learning environment	Promote positive facial expressions, supportive gestures	Scale up the participation of students and reduce the level of anxiety in language classes	Some teachers show resistance toward applying it.

## 7. Conclusions

This study clearly states that the interaction between teachers and students is vital for effective teaching and also greatly contributes to language learning through motivation of the learners. The study goes on to stress that learning cannot be achieved solely because of intellectual capacity, but also due to other psychological, social, and emotional reasons, where teacher's actions, including the use of non-verbal communication like facial expression and gestures, motivate the learners. Creating an atmosphere that encourages learners definitely reduces their anxiety and enhances their understanding, thus leading them to participate actively in class activities. But, unfortunately, many teachers have no idea about the significance of non-verbal communication and how they can apply it in their teaching.

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