

## **The Role of Teacher's Nonverbal Communication in Shaping Students' Motivation in Learning English**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates students' perceptions of the English teacher's non-verbal communication and the non-verbal influence on their perceptions of the teacher's role and classroom performance. The research conducted at SMP Negeri 40 Makassar used a mixed-methods design, and the data were gathered through a Likert-scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The 31 eighth-grade students were selected using simple random sampling to represent different classes within the school. The findings show that students generally interpret their teacher's non-verbal communication positively. Moreover, the intended meanings behind gestures, facial expressions, and body language were effectively understood by the students, contributing to a more engaging and meaningful learning experience. The findings revealed that students had positive perceptions of their teacher's nonverbal communication. The intended meanings behind the teacher's nonverbal cues were generally well understood by the students. The nonverbal elements examined, such as gestures, eye contact, and tone of voice, functioned effectively in supporting the teaching process. Most students agreed that nonverbal communication enhanced their motivation, helped them focus on the lesson, and encouraged active participation such as speaking and answering questions. However, a few students reported feelings of nervousness, apathy, or fear of being noticed during class. The results highlight the crucial role of nonverbal communication as a motivational tool in language classrooms, suggesting that teacher training programs should include nonverbal communication awareness and strategies to improve teaching effectiveness and student engagement. The entire teacher's nonverbal communication, where the researcher focused, namely gestures, eye contact, and tone of voice, functioned well. Students agreed that the use of nonverbal communication in the teaching and learning process works. Teachers' nonverbal communication during the teaching and learning process

motivated students to learn, focused their attention on the teacher's explanations, and made them eager to speak or answer questions, although some students feel nervous, apprehensive in the learning process, and feel afraid of being noticed.

**Key words:** *Perception; Non-Verbal Communication; Motivation*

## INTRODUCTION

The teaching effectiveness shows strong communication between teacher and student, where supporting academic success and advancement in the profession requires the teacher to possess well-developed communication skills. The non-verbal communication plays an essential role in classroom dynamics by enhancing instruction clarity and developing student comprehension. The teacher is expected to deliver clear, accessible explanations to make the students understand the lesson. (Pogue & Ahyun, 2006), The students are more likely to grasp the material when the teacher communicates effectively. Communication in the classroom functions as a two-way channel, enabling teachers and students to exchange information, build connections, and engage in more meaningful learning. The teacher's communication quality significantly affects the student learning outcomes.

According to (Ahmad & Aziz, 2009), students' perception can be applied and serve practically as essential input in exploratory research, where it gives a meaningful contribution in the teaching-learning process by providing insights and recommendations for teacher professional development. The study shows the importance of examining non-verbal communication in the educational field. Although several studies show that most have centered on university-level and have been implemented abroad. Additionally, the study mostly focused on the relationship between non-verbal communication and student motivation. Meanwhile, the study aims to explore students' perceptions, as understanding the students' perception on the teacher's non-verbal cues is essential to achieve effective classroom communication.

Although numerous studies have examined the nonverbal communication role in education, most have been conducted in international contexts and have predominantly focused on university-level students. Furthermore, previous research tends to emphasize the relationship among teachers' nonverbal communication and student motivation, with limited attention given to how students themselves perceive their teachers' nonverbal behaviors in the classroom. This leaves a critical gap in understanding how nonverbal communication is received and interpreted by younger learners, especially in junior high school settings in Indonesia.

The study focuses on exploring junior high school students' perceptions of their English teacher's nonverbal communication and its influence on the interpretation of the teacher's role and performance. By centering on the students' point of view, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of teacher-student interaction

dynamics at the secondary level and provides insights that can inform teacher training, classroom communication strategies, and student engagement practices.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Previous Related Study**

First, by Wahyuni (2018), who found that verbal communication and nonverbal communication are could not be separated from transporting a meaning of a message. For that reason, integrating these two kinds of communication in teaching and learning process from teacher would increase the successes of teaching and learning, especially in core of students' motivation. However, in Indonesian English classroom, it seems that many teachers still believe that students' low engagement in classroom activities and material explanation is because the students are lazy. Deep to the under surface, many students are affected by their teacher positive and/or negative attitude in classroom. This problem may drive the students to be unmotivated to participate in learning activities, hence it is important to have a deep understanding for the teacher to maximize their immediacy behaviors in their classroom. It will help students to have a good performance and engagement in English learning activities.

Second, Liu (2021) in her study about "Does Teacher Immediacy Affect Students? A Systematic Review of the Association Between Teacher Verbal and Non-verbal Immediacy and Student Motivation" shows that the teachers' verbal and non-verbal immediacy with student motivation is important, with several aspects underexplored. The first systematic review specifically examines the teacher immediacy influences students' motivation within instructional and learning environments. The results show that a teacher who shows high immediacy, both in words and actions, positively impacts students' motivation. However, the study shows the need for further research with a stronger methodological approach, incorporating self-report instruments, and investigating contextual factors as the mediator.

Third, Mestan (2016) in his study "Students' Perception about Teachers' Nonverbal Immediacy Behavior: A Case of Communication Sciences Faculty" found that by using immediate behaviors, teacher foster stronger relationship with students and contribute to supportive and engaging classroom environment, which translates as students being more interested and motivated and learning more effectively. For this reason, teacher immediacy behaviors need to be investigated, and instructors' awareness about immediacy behaviors should be raised. Literature suggests that teacher immediacy results in higher levels of affect for the teacher and the content of the course, higher levels of cognitive learning, student motivation and teacher-student interaction, lower levels of resistance to the teacher, classroom anxiety and status differences between teachers and students, higher perceptions of teacher's clarity, credibility and competence and higher evaluations from students and supervisors.

## **Perception**

Perception is a fundamental psychological process through which individuals recognize and make sense of objects, events, or stimuli by engaging their senses such as sight, hearing, and touch. According to Chaplin (1981), perception involves a sensory-based understanding of external objects and events. Solso et al. (2007), as cited in Grafiyana (2016), describe perception as the interpretation of sensory input gathered through the five senses. The direct perception theory suggests that perception develops through the direct acquisition of environmental information. Furthermore, Anggrawan et al. (2019) found that students' cognitive grammar was more effectively developed in online learning settings compared to offline, indicating that perception is shaped by learning contexts and challenges. These findings show that perception is not merely a passive reception of stimuli, but an active, interpretative process influenced by the environment, making it a deeply personal and subjective experience.

## **Students Perception**

Student perception, in this context, refers to how students interpret and connect what they experience—such as what they see or feel in the classroom—with their existing knowledge and expectations. This interpretation may not always align with objective reality, as students often perceive events through the lens of their prior experiences. As Mark (2013) notes, people use their personal experiences to shape how they perceive their surroundings. In the classroom, this means that students may respond differently to the same teacher behavior based on their individual backgrounds. Agarwal (2019) emphasizes that motivation and learning outcomes are highly dependent on how a subject is taught, including how students detect, interpret, and emotionally respond to learning experiences. This underscores the importance of understanding student perception in evaluating the effectiveness of instruction.

## **Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication is a key factor influencing student perception. Nordquist (2018) defines nonverbal communication as the exchange of messages without the use of spoken or written words, while Lunenburg (2010) highlights its components, including body language, gestures, facial expressions, and posture. In educational settings, nonverbal cues can reinforce verbal instruction, regulate classroom interaction, and express emotions such as encouragement or concern. Effective use of nonverbal communication helps teachers build rapport, maintain engagement, and convey clarity. The specific forms of nonverbal communication examined in this study include facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and physical appearance. Facial expressions serve as universal indicators of emotion and intent; eye contact can show attentiveness or confidence; gestures aid in clarifying

meaning; and physical appearance contributes to perceptions of professionalism and authority.

### **Communication**

Communication, particularly nonverbal, also plays a vital role in shaping students' motivation to learn. According to Bakar (2014), motivation is a complex construct that affects how students allocate effort and persist in learning tasks. Nonverbal cues from teachers—such as a smile, a nod, or open body posture—can act as motivational triggers, boosting students' confidence and willingness to participate. Motivation can be classified into four types: positive motivation, which involves encouragement or rewards; negative motivation, which stems from fear of punishment; intrinsic motivation, which arises from internal interest or enjoyment; and extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by external rewards like grades or praise. When teachers use nonverbal communication effectively, they can influence both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, thereby enhancing the overall learning environment.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the study focuses on three main variables: students' perception, nonverbal communication, and student motivation. Students' perception refers to how they interpret their teacher's nonverbal behavior and its impact on their learning motivation. The forms of nonverbal communication considered include facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and physical appearance. Student motivation is examined through the lens of its four categories—positive, negative, intrinsic, and extrinsic—as influenced by the teacher's nonverbal communication. This framework supports an exploration of how junior high school students perceive their English teacher's nonverbal communication and how these perceptions relate to their motivation to learn the language.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Samples**

In this study used Mixed Method – Explanatory Sequential Design (A mixed approach that begins with quantitative data collection, then continues with qualitative data to explain the quantitative results in more depth). While the sample of the research is defined as the group who's the researcher obtained all the information of the research. The researcher used a random sampling technique taking one class in SMP Negeri 40 Makassar, eighth class as the subject of the research.

### **Instrument and Procedure**

The research instruments used in this study were a questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire aimed to gather students' responses regarding the use of

their teacher's nonverbal communication as a strategy to motivate them in learning English. It employed a Likert Scale to measure the students' levels of agreement or disagreement with various statements related to this topic. Meanwhile, the interview was conducted to obtain deeper insights and opinions from students about their perceptions of the teacher's nonverbal communication. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for guided yet flexible conversations, and the questions were based on the theoretical framework adopted by the researcher. These interviews were conducted individually with five selected students at SMP Negeri 40 Makassar, who were chosen as class representatives to provide accurate and meaningful data.

The procedure for distributing the questionnaire involved several steps. First, the researcher explained the purpose and content of the nonverbal communication questionnaire to the students. After the explanation, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the participants. Once the students completed the questionnaire, they submitted it back to the researcher. Finally, after collecting all the required data, the researcher proceeded to analyze the responses to draw conclusions about the role of nonverbal communication in motivating students to learn English.

### **Data Analysis**

This study employed interviews and questionnaires to collect data on students' perceptions of their teacher's nonverbal communication and its impact on their motivation to learn English. The data collection tools used were designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative insights. The first tool was the interview. According to Best (1981), interviews are an effective method for understanding participants' experiences through spoken questions. In this study, interviews were used to explore students' thoughts and feelings regarding their teacher's nonverbal behavior during class. The interviews were semi-structured, which means they followed a general framework of questions while still allowing flexibility for open-ended responses and in-depth discussion.

The second tool was a questionnaire consisting of 25 closed-ended items designed to measure students' responses to their teacher's nonverbal communication. The questionnaire utilized a Likert Scale with five response options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Each response carried a corresponding point value, with "Strongly Agree" receiving the highest score and "Strongly Disagree" the lowest. If a student selected "Strongly Agree" for all items, the total score would be 100, while selecting "Strongly Disagree" for all items would result in a score of 20. To interpret the results, scores were categorized into five levels: 81.3–100 indicated a Strongly Positive perception, 61.6–80.3 Positive, 41.9–60.6 Undecided, 22.2–40.9 Negative, and 20–22.1 Strongly Negative. These tools allowed the researchers to assess both the students' general attitudes and specific responses toward nonverbal communication in the English learning environment.

## RESULT AND DISUSSION

The findings cover the result of the questionnaire and interview which is based on the research question “What is the students’ perception towards their teachers’ nonverbal use of communication which affects their motivation in learning English”

### Students’ perceptions towards the teachers’ nonverbal communications

Based on the data analysis from the questionnaire, it was determined that most of students perceived their teachers’ nonverbal communications positively. It can be seen from the data and the result of mean score in the questionnaire that was calculated as below:

a. Mean score of VIII class with their teacher

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$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

$$\bar{x} = \frac{2.411}{31}$$

$$= 77,7$$

The total score from VIII class questionnaire was 2.4111 with the total sampling was 31. It shows that the mean score of the students’ perceptions toward teacher’s nonverbal communications in English learning classroom is 77,7% which is classified as positive. The results of the mean score was supported by frequency and the percentage of the questionnaire which showed on the table below.

*Table 1. Students’ Perception*

Range of Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Students’ Perception
81,3 - 100	9	29%	Strongly Positive
61,6 - 80,3	22	71%	Positive
41,9 - 60,6	-	-	Neutral
22,2 - 40,9	-	-	Negative
25,0 – 22,1	-	-	Strongly Negative
Total	31	100%	

Based from students’ explanation on the interview, the students gave random responses about their perception to their English teacher.

**Teachers’ kinesics nonverbal communications according to VIII students with teacher.**

Based on the questionnaire and interview the researcher found that the students perceive their teachers' kinesics nonverbal communications positively. The teachers' kinesics focus on teachers' physical appearance, eye-contact, gestures and body movement, and facial expression.

The first part of the questionnaire deals with teachers' physical appearance. The first item of part one showed that both classes agree that they consciously pay attention to the teachers' physical appearance. This is strength by the following extracts:

*"... Saya perhatikan pakaiannya, jibabnya, sama sifatnya atau kepribadiannya"*

"I consciously pay attention to her dress, her scarf, and her personality"<sup>[1]</sup>  
(Y VIII.5, January 20<sup>th</sup> 2025)

*"... oh jelas hehehe dari bajunya, tinggi badannya juga hehe"*

"oh absolutely hehehe from their clothes, and their postures if he is tall or short hehe)  
(ZZZ VIII.1, January 20<sup>th</sup> 2025)

As the result, VIII. 5 and VIII.1 students pay attention to teachers' physical appearance consciously especially in the first meeting. Therefore, the researcher conclude that the students' pay attention more at the way their teachers dress up. This goes in line with Simoncic (2016), she stated that although most students agree that non-verbal communication is interpreted more unconsciously than most is when it comes to four basic facets of non-verbal communication in question (physical presentation, facial gestures, eye contact and body movement), these aspects are perceived more consciously than unconsciously. The findings of her studies revealed that students could build their impression of professors on the basis of their physical appearance only.

The second item deals with female teacher's make up. The researcher had explained in the findings that it only concerns with the female teacher's make up that is to say it concerns with VIII.5 class only. The result of the questionnaire showed that their English teacher does not put too much of make up. However, in the interview section the researcher asked some students about their opinion on female teacher who puts too much of make up on.

*"Eh seharusnya toh kak, guru itu jadi contoh bagaimana merias. Tidak seharusnya juga guru terlalu menor. Nanti diceritai sama siswanya karena nategurki baru dia yang melakukan."*

"Umm, teacher should be a role model of how to make up. She shouldn't be putting too much make up on. Students will talk about her if she yells at the students (by putting make up) meanwhile she is the one who does too much make up on"

(DR VIII.4, January 20<sup>th</sup> 2025)

*“Tidak suka. Karena kalau terlalu menor kesannya kalau menjelaskan bukannya memperhatikan penjelasan malah melihat make upnya”*  
“I don’t like it. If the teacher put too much make up on while explaining the lesson. Instead of paying attention to the lesson, the students will pay attention to her make-up”  
(VPR VIII.5, January 20<sup>th</sup> 2025)

The extracts above show that female teacher should be role model of their students especially female students. Female teacher’s makeup will not do any good in the class since it will just make the students focus on the makeup not to the lesson taught. It is related to Li 2011, he stated that there was an effect of the teacher’s use of cosmetics on classroom teaching. He mentioned that female teachers should be careful about the use of makeup. Female teachers should be vigilant because they may appear to be not attentive to learners and teachers because they do not occupy a gender-based role, and students may question their ability, experience, skill, personality, and even morality. Item number three, four and five deals with fashion trends and the dress that should be worn by the teachers. The researcher will show the extracts of the conversations between the researcher and the interviewees then discuss about the result.

### **Teacher’s nonverbal forms of communication**

Based on the questionnaire, and interview the researcher found that the students perceive their teachers’ kinesics nonverbal communications positively. The teachers’ kinesics are physical appearance, eye-contact, gestures and body movement, and facial expression. The findings of this study clearly support and align with several established theories and previous research on nonverbal communication in education. Firstly, Poyatos (2002) emphasized that nonverbal communication—such as facial expressions, gestures, posture, and movement—plays a vital role in enhancing spoken messages in the classroom. This theory is confirmed by the students’ responses, where a majority expressed that their teacher’s gestures and facial expressions positively influenced their motivation to learn English. In addition, Simoncic (2016) found that students tend to feel demotivated when teachers remain seated and inactive during lessons. This aligns with the students’ feedback in the interview portion of this study, where they stated a preference for teachers who stand and move around, as it makes the lesson feel more engaging and interactive.

Furthermore, this study’s findings echo the work of Mehrabian (1972), who proposed that a large part of communication is nonverbal, particularly in conveying attitudes and emotions. When teachers use positive body language, it creates a welcoming environment that encourages student participation and emotional engagement, both of which are essential for second language acquisition. By comparing the current findings with these established theories, it is clear that nonverbal communication is not just supportive, but essential to effective teaching—especially in language learning contexts. This underlines the importance

of training teachers to be aware of and intentionally use nonverbal cues to enhance their teaching effectiveness and student motivation.

The researcher concluded that most of the students expect the teacher to stand up during teaching and learning process. Teacher who stands up during the lesson is seen as an active teacher as the students can see his or her gestures and body movement which has a positive impact to the students as well. It is also related to the result of Simoncic 2016, she found that Students lack confidence and become unmotivated if the lecturer spends the whole lecture in a chair that does not require any body 45 activity. That is why it is no wonder that the majority of students agree that body gestures have an effect on the classroom environment, which in turn is beneficial to learning. There are many roles that our body's motions and positions serve with regard to our spoken language, as stated by Poyatos (2002:187), and it is therefore no surprise that body movement, eye contact, facial expression and physical presentation have a crucial role to play in the overall teaching and learning process. students agree That is why is no wonder that the majority of students agree that body language.

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire data, the majority of students demonstrated positive perceptions toward their teachers' use of nonverbal communication in the classroom. The calculated mean score from Class VIII was 77.7%, which falls within the "positive" range. This finding is supported by the frequency and percentage distribution of the questionnaire responses, where 71% of students perceived their teacher's nonverbal communication positively, and 29% rated it as strongly positive. No respondents rated their perception as neutral or negative, highlighting a consistent trend of favorable views. This is further supported by Simoncic (2016), who found that the four basic facets of nonverbal communication—physical presentation, facial expressions, eye contact, and body movement—are consciously noticed by students and significantly contribute to their perception of the teacher.

The interviews provided richer insights into how students perceive specific forms of kinesics, such as physical appearance, gestures, facial expressions, and body movement. For instance, several students mentioned paying close attention to the teacher's appearance, particularly on first impressions. Clothing style, posture, and grooming were among the aspects that shaped their initial perception. This supports Simoncic's (2016) argument that physical appearance plays a substantial role in how students form impressions of their teachers. In terms of makeup, female students expressed the view that teachers should serve as role models. Excessive makeup, according to them, can become a distraction during the lesson. This echoes Li's (2011) findings, which suggest that inappropriate use of cosmetics by teachers may undermine their credibility and distract students from learning.

The study also found that students positively perceived gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. These forms of nonverbal communication were seen as contributing to a more engaging classroom environment. Students reported feeling

more motivated when their teacher moved around the class, used expressive gestures, and maintained eye contact. This finding supports Poyatos' (2002) theory that nonverbal elements serve to reinforce verbal messages, particularly in classroom settings. The interviews also revealed that students preferred teachers who stand and move during lessons rather than remaining seated. A teacher's movement, according to the students, indicated energy and attentiveness, and created a more dynamic and motivating learning atmosphere. This is aligned with Simoncic's (2016) research, which indicated that a sedentary teacher could reduce student motivation and engagement.

The findings are consistent with foundational theories in the field of nonverbal communication. Mehrabian (1972) argued that the majority of communication, particularly in expressing attitudes and emotions, is nonverbal. In line with this, the current study shows that nonverbal cues such as body language and facial expression not only support the teacher's spoken language but also play a critical role in building rapport and motivating students in the language learning process. Moreover, this study reinforces the idea that nonverbal communication contributes significantly to the emotional climate of the classroom, which in turn affects learners' motivation, attention, and participation—especially in second language acquisition contexts.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, it can be concluded that teachers' use of nonverbal communication (NVC) has a positive and significant impact on students' attitudes during the teaching and learning process, as well as on their comprehension of the subject matter. Most students agreed that their teacher's nonverbal behaviors—such as gestures, facial expressions, and movement—motivated them to learn, helped them focus on explanations, and encouraged them to participate by speaking or answering questions. However, a small number of students reported feeling nervous, apathetic, or afraid of being noticed due to the teacher's nonverbal cues. Based on these findings, several practical recommendations can be made. First, teacher training programs should include modules on nonverbal communication, both in pre-service and in-service training, to raise awareness of how body language influences student motivation and understanding. Second, in daily classroom practice, teachers should be encouraged to use open gestures, expressive facial cues, and purposeful movement to reinforce their verbal communication and foster a more engaging learning environment. Third, schools could implement feedback mechanisms that allow students to share how they perceive their teacher's nonverbal behavior, supporting more reflective and responsive teaching. Finally, classroom layout should be designed to support teacher movement and ensure visibility, thereby maximizing opportunities for effective nonverbal interaction.

To expand on this study, future research could explore several areas. Cross-cultural comparisons could investigate how students from different cultural backgrounds interpret teachers' nonverbal cues, as perceptions may differ significantly across cultures. Longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of consistent

teacher nonverbal behavior on students' academic performance, confidence, and language development. Additionally, researchers could explore subject-specific impacts by comparing the effects of nonverbal communication in other disciplines such as mathematics or science, to determine whether certain subjects benefit more from NVC strategies. Lastly, with the growing use of online and hybrid learning, future studies could investigate how nonverbal communication functions in digital environments and how teachers can adapt their techniques effectively for virtual platforms.

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