

Learners Perceptions On Nonverbal Communication Of The Teachers In Online Classes

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ABSTRACT

Due to the Coronavirus effect, almost all the teaching-learning activities are restricted to the online mode. Consequently, there have been doubts about the efficacy of the communication between teachers and students in online classes. The previous research works on the impact of nonverbal communication held that the proportion of nonverbal communication occupies a significant part of teaching. Therefore, the study examined the efficacy of the nonverbal communication of the teachers in online classes. The effectiveness of nonverbal communication, specifically Proxemics, Kinesics, and Vocalists or Paralanguage of the teachers was compared between the virtual and offline modes of classrooms. This study was conducted in the context of an English language classroom in India. The data was collected from the respondents who were graduate students in the social science disciplines. A survey questionnaire in the form of a Likert scale was circulated among the respondents to obtain the data. And data was analysed quantitatively with the percentages of frequencies among the options provided in the Likert scale. And based on the exploratory data analysis, the study inferred findings on the efficacy of the aforementioned nonverbal aspects in online classes.

Keywords: Nonverbal communication, Language teaching, Virtual Classroom

I. INTRODUCTION

Before the evolution of languages, human communication was primarily based on nonverbal means. Despite the development of languages with complex structures, nonverbal means were treated as the essential parts of communication. And it was also popularly propagated that nonverbal means occupy a predominant proportion than verbal means. Burgoon, J. K., Woodall, W. G., Buller, D. B. stated, "at least 65% of the meaning in any social situation is conveyed nonverbally." (Burgoon, J. K., Woodall, W. G., Buller, D. B. 1996, pp.4).

In the decade 1960s, the study of nonverbal communication (NVC) developed to a new stage with gestures as the focal point of research. From the 1980s onwards, the research on NVC was expanded by Chinese scholars who continued this research from different dimensions like linguistics, architecture, art, sociology, etc.

Definition

Every day, people depend on nonverbal behaviours such as performing facial expressions, postures and actions, consciously and unconsciously. And these signals convey different messages about us to others consciously or unconsciously. Many studies have emphasised some crucial facts about our use of NVC with different definitions. Mark Knapp (1980:18) defined nonverbal communication as: “non-verbal behaviour that people perform with the value of the message and the signals to which meaning will be attributed. It can be used to describe all human communication events that transcend spoken or written words.” Burgoon and Sain (cited in Malandra, 1989:7) stated, “NVC is the qualities or behaviours known to all in a community without the use of words and such qualities or behaviours are intentionally given by the speaker and consciously received and responded by the listeners”. As per Abererombic definition, “We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our whole body.” (Cited in Bijiwan 1995:72). James C and Steverk explained, “Nonverbal communication is a process, in which one person stimulating meaning in the mind of another person non-verbally.” The linguist Samovar (2000) has made a great effort to interpret the term. He proposed, "NVC involves all those nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the variety of ways without the use of verbal codes. It is both intentional and unintentional.”

The impact of gestures in communication was started after the 1960s (Kendon, 2004). The gestures of the speakers were also examined from the perspectives of psychology and communicative science (e.g., Argyle, 1967; Condon & Ogston, 1967; Duncan, 1972). The relation between the body movements and speeches of the speaker was analysed comprehensively with the structural approach (e.g., Birdwhistell, 1970). (Kendon, 1972) evaluated the complementary nature between gestures and speech.

Nonverbal Communication in Teaching

Nonverbal cues play a predominant role in the teaching to convey the meaning, so it is considered essential in curriculum transaction (Knapp, M. 1971, pp. 243-249). The importance of nonverbal communication and its semantic implications are inevitable in teaching (Smith, H. 1979, pp. 631-6672). Studies stated that 65% of meaning is conveyed through nonverbal means in a social situation. However, in the classroom context, the role of nonverbal communication is estimated to be 82%.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pennycook, A. conducted a study on the role of the environment in the communication process. He opines that the environment plays a crucial role along with the other communication aspects such as Proxemics, Haptics, Chronemics, Kinesics, Artifacts, and Vocalists or Paralanguage. Teachers need to be well trained in nonverbal communication since it has a significant impact on their teaching. In fact Hansen argues that teachers must be conscious about their nonverbal communication, and they should monitor the communication made through proximity, eye contact, gestures, and touching (Hansen, J. 2010, pp. 35-40). Dunning observed that two instruments: a one and half hour training module, and a self-evaluation model conducted by the counsellors had a high level of reliability of the nonverbal behaviour of the clients. And this study also asserts that training of this nature would make the trainers reliable judges of the nonverbal communication of the trainees (Dunning, G. 1971, pp.250-258). A study was set in the L2 classrooms in one of the US universities by (SMOTROVA, T. 2017, pp. 59-89). The analysis based on the video-recorded interactions between the teachers and students found that teachers who were using gestures while teaching the suprasegmental feature of the language were more

effective. Another work related to the verbal interpretation of nonverbal cues of the teachers was carried out by (LEWIS, P., & PAGE, Z. 1974, pp. 371-375). This study believed that teachers are capable of handling emotions through verbal and nonverbal communication. Furthermore, teachers are also able to enable the students to convey their emotions verbally and will be in the position to interpret the nonverbal gestures. O'Hair, M., & Ropo, E., the teacher educators, emphasise nonverbal communication in the classrooms. They argue that understanding nonverbal communication is essential to understand diversity in the classroom setup. Therefore, the research on nonverbal communication and its practice should be prioritised in the teacher education programmes (O'Hair, M., & Ropo, E. 1994, pp. 91-112). (Gregersen, T., Olivares-Cuhat, G., & Storm, J. 2009, pp. 195-208) This study asserts, "...there is a connection between the second language competency and frequency and type of gesture use." This study found that the advanced learners of the second language tend to use meaning enhancing, and speech-related gestures. This study also proposes to the teachers to be equipped with "gestural competence" as the learners are not adequately exposed to the Second Language cultural norms. (Gullberg, M., & McCafferty, S. 2008, pp. 133-146) conducted a detailed study on the impact of gesture in Second Language Learning. Though authors identified gesture as a new perspective in SLA theories, they suggest further investigations to establish the influence of gesture in conveying meaning, and how the meaning is conveyed if a different gesture is used for targeted information in the L2 context. Goodboy, A., Weber, K., & San Bolkan experimented with the teachers' nonverbal immediacy and verbal immediacy to find the links between cognitive and affective learning outcomes. This experiment found that on a recall test students with high verbal and nonverbal immediacy performed better (Goodboy, A., Weber, K., & San Bolkan. 2009, pp. 4-12). The research of Galloway, C. suggests that the teacher must depend on the reactions and the responses of the students to assess the nonverbal cues of the teachers (Galloway, C. 1968, pp. 172-175). Teachers can access this in the form of the reactions of the students. Woolfolk, A., & Brooks, D. explain the importance of nonverbal communication that should not be treated as a separate entity but an integral part of teaching (Woolfolk, A., & Brooks, D. 1983, pp. 103-149). And this work also suggests that teacher education cannot afford to ignore the importance of nonverbal communication. Love, A., & Roderick, J. recommend that the teachers' nonverbal behaviour should reach the level of conscious awareness. And this study also suggests that congruence and incongruence between verbal and nonverbal communication in the teaching-learning context is a paramount need (Love, A., & Roderick, J. 1971, pp. 295-299). GOODALL, R., & KACHUR, D. are also of the same opinion that the nonverbal behaviours of the teachers significantly affect the learning process of the learners (GOODALL, R., & KACHUR, D. 1977, pp. 44-48). Therefore teachers must be trained to integrate nonverbal behaviour into their teaching.

III. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

In this study, 240 Social Science graduate students were taken as respondents. A questionnaire in the form of the Likert scale was administered among the respondents. This questionnaire has four aspects of nonverbal communication, i.e. Kinesics comprising eye contact, Body Movements, & Gestures, proxemics, and paralanguage aspects. The questionnaire attempted to enquire about the perception of the effectiveness of teachers' nonverbal communication. Therefore, a comparative study was attempted to evaluate the difference between online and physical classes regarding teachers nonverbal communication. And the effectiveness of these two modes of classes was measured on the effectiveness scale, which had the options of 'Extremely Effective', 'Very Effective',

‘Moderately Effective’, ‘Effective’ and ‘Not Effective’. In the present study, the frequencies of the scale options were quantitatively calculated to arrive at the findings.

Data Analysis:

Q No	Nonverbal Aspect	Mode of Classes	Extremely Effective	%	Very Effective	%	Moderately Effective	%	Effective	%	Not Effective	%	Unanswered	%
1	Proxemics	Physical Classes	31	13	41	17	98	41	22	9	19	8	29	12
		Online Classes	10	4	5	2	39	16	85	35	91	38	10	4
2	Facial Expressions	Physical Classes	42	18	42	18	85	35	12	5	29	12	30	13
		Online Classes	6	3	13	5	67	28	59	25	82	34	13	5
	Eye Contact	Physical Classes	40	17	46	19	82	34	13	5	27	11	32	13
		Online Classes	4	2	4	2	35	15	41	17	144	60	12	5
	Body Language	Physical Classes	44	18	34	14	89	37	16	7	23	10	34	14
		Online Classes	4	2	8	3	46	19	54	23	113	47	15	6
	Gestures	Physical Classes	35	15	41	17	84	35	22	9	24	10	34	14
		Online Classes	3	1	8	3	52	22	75	31	86	36	16	7
3	Para Language	Physical Classes	44	18	38	16	90	38	13	5	21	9	34	14
		Online Classes	8	3	13	5	74	31	72	30	57	24	16	7

Source: Primary Data

Proxemics

The data indicated that there was a difference in proxemics between physical and online classes. Among the positive options, extremely effective, very effective, and moderately effective, a favourable tendency was shown in online classes. 4% opined that proxemics was extremely effective in online classes against 14% in physical classes, 2% chose the option of very effective for online classes against 17% for physical classes, 16% of the respondents stated proxemics was moderately effective in online classes against 41% in physical classes. However, the last positive option effective was selected by 35% of the students for online classes against only 8% for the physical classes. And for 8% of the students observed physical classes were ‘Not Effective’ whereas 38% of the students perceived proxemics was ‘Not Effective’ in online classes.

Kinesics

Facial expressions of the teachers in physical classes were recorded to be 18% as extremely effective, 18% as very effective, 35% as moderately effective’ 5% as effective and 12% as not effective. Related to the role of facial expressions of the teachers in conveying meaning in online classes, 3% of the respondents observed it was extremely effective, 5% of the respondents found it was very effective, 28% of them perceived it as moderately effective, 25% of them held it was effective, and 34% of the respondents stated it was not effective. With regards to the perception of the students on the effectiveness of eye contact of the teachers, 17% of the participants opined extremely effective, 46% perceived as very effective, 82% of them stated as moderately effective, 13% chose the option of effective and 27% of the respondents rejected as not effective in the physical classes. In the online classes, this trend was appeared to be reversed 2% of the samples opined as extremely effective, 2% of them chose the option of very effective, 15% of the respondents selected the option of moderately effective, and 60% of the respondents perceived it as not effective. The difference between physical classes and online classes was high concerning the 'not effective' option. The students perceived that the eye contact of the teachers in the online mode of classes is not effective.

As the part of nonverbal communication, the Effectiveness of the body language of the teachers was found as following, 18% of the students perceived that body movement of the teachers in physical classes was 'extremely effective', 14% chose 'very effective,' 37% of students selected 'moderately effective' and 7% of the students opted 'not effective.' Whereas in online classes it was rated as 2%, 3%, 19%, and 23% respectively as 'extremely effective', 'very effective', 'moderately effective', 'effective' and 'not effective'. Very similar to the perception of eye contact even body language was negated as a 'not effective' one.

Gestures of the teachers were rated to be 'extremely effective' by 15%, 'very effective' by 17% of the students, 'moderately effective' by 35%, 'effective' by 9% of the students, and 'not effective' by 10% of the students. In online classes teachers gestures were rated as 1% of the students stated 'extremely effective,' 3% of the students perceived as 'very effective,' 22% of the students mentioned 'moderately effective,' 31% of the students stated it was 'effective,' and 36% of the students stated not effective.

Paralanguage

The aspect of paralanguage was seen to be less affected in the online classes where the option of 'extremely effective' was chosen by 18% and 3% of the students in physical and online classes respectively, the option of 'very effective' was opted by 16% and 5% of the students in physical and online classes respectively. The option of 'moderately effective' was selected by 38% and 31% of the students in physical and online classes respectively. 'Effective' option was exercised by 5% of the students in offline (physical) classes, and 30% of the students in online classes. It is inferred in this study that the paralanguage aspect was less affected in the online classes. However, the effectiveness of the paralanguage aspect of the teachers in online classes compared to physical classes was found to be less.

IV. FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

With the data analysed above, the present study had come up with the following findings:

1. In the responses on the effectiveness of the Proxemics in the online classes, it was found that only 38% of the students stated that proxemics was not effective in online classes. It can be inferred from the data that the nonverbal aspect of Proxemics was effective in online classes but to different degrees. Therefore, teachers need to be available for the students in all the possible online platforms to bridge the gap.
2. In kinesics, the effectiveness of the eye contact of the teachers was rated too low as 'not effective', body language followed the next. The facial expressions and gestures were rated positively. Therefore the teachers need to pay special attention to the first two aspects i.e. Eye-contact and body language. Teachers need to use suitable technology to deliver the classes in a standing posture to overcome the problems of eye contact. Teachers can ask questions to the random students in the class to gauge their attentive level.
3. The effectiveness of the paralanguage of the teachers, the study found that it was not effective. Along with appropriate communicative devices, teachers need to pay attention to their paralanguage aspects.

V. CONCLUSION

There was a positive tendency among the students in adopting online classes despite various challenges and shortcomings. Nonverbal communication in the online classes was not hampered drastically. The physical distance was not perceived as a hindrance. Gestures and facial expressions of the teachers were perceived to be effective in conveying the meaning, however, the effectiveness of eye contact and body language was found to be poor. Paralanguage was not perceived to be an effective aspect of nonverbal communication in online teaching.

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