

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS'
NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION ON TEACHING AND
LEARNING ENGLISH AT SOME UNIVERSITIES IN BA RIA –
VUNG TAU PROVINCE**

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to investigate teachers' nonverbal communication and its impact on teaching and learning English as a foreign language at some colleges and university in Ba Ria – Vung Tau. The research's subjects are the lecturers and the students from Ba Ria-Vung Tau University, Tourism Vocational school and Petroleum University in Vung Tau city. The results from the questionnaires, the class observations and the interview reports show that teachers' nonverbal communication has been regarded as an important factor affecting remarkably EFL teaching and learning by both the teachers and the students. Also, the findings of the research demonstrate that teachers pay much attention to their nonverbal communication when teaching English. Furthermore, the research points out the powerful impact of teachers' nonverbal communication on the process of teaching and learning English. Similarly, students' awareness of what teachers' nonverbal communication can communicate and their desire are provided necessarily. Above all, implications and suggestions for further research are made in the conclusion with the hope that better methods for measuring the impact of teachers' nonverbal communication on EFL teaching and learning would be investigated so that nonverbal communication could be involved in teacher-training programs.

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

Nonverbal communication plays an important role in teaching English. Many researchers in the fields of psychology, anthropology and linguistics have emphasized the importance of nonverbal communication in human interaction. Mehrabian (1972) and Von Raffler-Engel (1976a) argued that language acquisition could not be fully understood unless it is observed within its context of socialization and unless the concomitant paralinguistic behaviors were also observed. Explaining the significance of nonverbal communication, Abercrombie wrote: “We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our whole body” (1968: 55).

According to Bateson (1955), communication research shows that “as much as 90 percent of the social content of a message is transmitted paralinguistically and nonverbally.”

Along with verbal communication, nonverbal communication is an important part helping everyone to communicate more successfully. Nonverbal communication has received much attention in the areas of business presentation, sales and marketing, and the development of social skills. However, the role of nonverbal communication in pedagogical environment is not fully realized and exploited by the teachers and educators. This is also a problem in Vietnamese education.

Perhaps nonverbal communication has not received much attention because so much of our nonverbal behavior is unconscious, and it is assumed that nonverbal behavior will be picked up naturally by learners as they become more fluent. Nonverbal communication is not widely researched or taught, no doubt because language researchers and teachers focus on the spoken and written word – “language” after all is the subject of study and it is certainly much easier to capture than the elusive nonverbal behavior.

However, studying only the verbal elements without taking into account the nonverbal elements is as misguided as the blind man making conclusions about the elephant on the basis of touching only its trunk. Awareness of the importance of nonverbal behavior is crucial for teachers, students, researchers and pragmatists alike. Unfortunately, for most, nonverbal communication is

invisible. This paper argues that it is precise because it is so invisible that it should be examined more closely.

The above reality motivates me a lot about the impact of nonverbal communication especially teachers' nonverbal communication in the classrooms on teaching and learning English and how they can make their nonverbal communication more effective in the pedagogical environment.

This research was carried out to get *some main objectives*:

- To help teachers realize the importance and the impacts of using nonverbal communication in English classes.
- To encourage teachers to increase the effectiveness of using nonverbal communication in the pedagogical environment.
- To suggest some pedagogical considerations necessary for teachers to make their nonverbal communication better.

Research questions

For the above reasons and objectives, this research was conducted to find the answers for the following questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions about nonverbal communication in English classes?
2. What kinds of nonverbal communication do teachers often use in English classes?
3. What are students' attitudes toward teachers' nonverbal communication?
4. What are the suggestions for teachers to make their nonverbal communication better in English classes?

PART II: LITERATURE REVIEW

1. NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

1.1. What is nonverbal communication?

Communication in general is the process of sending and receiving messages that enables humans to share knowledge, attitudes and skills. Although we usually identify communication with speech, communication is composed of two dimensions- verbal and nonverbal.

Nonverbal communication has been defined as communication without words. It includes apparent behaviors such as facial expressions, eyes, touching, gestures and tones of voice as well

as less obvious messages such as dress, postures and spatial distance between two or more people.

“Communication messages without words come from nonverbal communication.” (Taylor, 1986: 110)

Nonverbal communication is an important, though often neglected, aspect of communication. The most obvious example of nonverbal communication, and one that most people think of first, is gestures. However, nonverbal communication takes a number of forms. How a person dresses, how classrooms are arranged, how far apart two people stand, and so on, all communicate or influence communication. Students of English can benefit from learning about nonverbal communication. An understanding of nonverbal communication can improve the effectiveness of communication.

<http://www.elcalendar.com/events/details/3762>)

Nonverbal communication may enhance or detract from a verbal communication. It regulates relationships by affecting the likelihood of introduction and continued interaction. We are able to infer emotion through nonverbal communication and influence other's perception of our competence, power and vulnerability. It also plays a role in the perception of the actual message we are trying to convey. It affects our lives in a myriad of ways from childhood throughout adulthood and as long as we intend to communicate with others. At times nonverbal cues may be used to emphasize a message we are trying to convey. On other occasions, it replaces verbal communications.

1.2. Nonverbal communication: A part of communicative competence

If we see different models of communicative competence, we can easily assess one thing and that is the significance of nonverbal communication.

Dell Hymes, a famous linguist who introduced the concept of communicative competence back in 1960's, believed that there were certain rules of use without which the linguistic or grammar rules were useless. Among many things, which he thought were needed for communicative competence, were also the rules of nonverbal communication (of the target language). Thus, he

highlighted the rules of nonverbal communication as important as other grammar rules for learning a second language.

1. 3. Why do we use nonverbal communication?

Humans use nonverbal communication because:

- ❖ *Words have limitations:* There are numerous areas where nonverbal communication is more effective than verbal (when being explained, the shape, directions, personalities are expressed nonverbally)
- ❖ *Nonverbal signals are powerful:* Nonverbal cues primarily express inner feelings (verbal messages deal basically with the outside world)
- ❖ *Nonverbal messages are likely to be more genuine* because nonverbal behaviors cannot be controlled as easily as spoken words.
- ❖ *Nonverbal signals can express feelings inappropriate to state:* Social etiquette limits what can be said but nonverbal cues can communicate thoughts.
- ❖ *A separate communication channel is necessary to help send complex messages:* A speaker can add enormously to the complexity of the verbal message.

Communication is basically a process of sharing meanings and this sharing of meanings involves many new kinds of interpretations. These interpretations sometimes become very risky especially in the oral communication where we try to interpret the message by analyzing the verbal part of the message only and ignore the nonverbal part. Because it is the nonverbal part which sometimes carries the real meaning due to which serious problems arise. Many instances of such situations can be found in the classrooms. We can use good verbal communication in our daily life when we are talking to our colleagues and friends. Non verbal communication is very important for teaching and learning English as well. Being a teacher, your non verbal communication is very important when you are teaching or you are talking to your students so in this communication your body language is more important than your word. Your students do not remember only your words but also your gesture and poses.

For example, when we say word “Pain” it is not showing the intensity of this feeling, and same thing with word “Happy”. By just saying “I am happy” without showing how happy you are. Only our body language will show the intensity of emotion or feeling. When we are in pain, we

will convey our message through facial expression. When we are happy we will show its intensity by jumping, smiling, laughing etc. We have different feeling for different people, in different situations and our reaction will be different as well. If we don't like anyone we will show our feeling by not talking to that person, looking at him with anger, lines on forehead etc. Only word will not convey message without our body movement it will be meaningless if one person is saying, “*I love you*” without any facial expression and without any body language, message will not be conveyed properly, But only hugging will convey your message of love.

1. 4. Functions of nonverbal communication

Argyle (1988) concluded there are five main primary functions of nonverbal bodily behavior in human communication

-  *Regulatory function:*
-  *Interpersonal function:*
-  *Emblematic function:*
-  *Illustrative function:*
-  *Adaptive function:*

1. 5. Aspects of nonverbal communication in the classroom

a. Body language

-  Body movements, gestures and postures
-  Facial expressions
-  Eye-contact
-  Distance
-  Touch

b. Vocal intonation and cues

c. Space and physical environment

-  Space:
-  Physical environment:

d. Dress

✕ Clothing

✕ Personal artifacts

e. Time

PART III: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

I will give the questionnaires for students and teachers, after that I summarize their answers and give the results through the tables, means of numbers or charts. These are the questions which I will interview and ask students as well as teachers.

3. 1. Teachers' perceptions of the importance of nonverbal communication in English classes?

3.1.1. The importance of nonverbal communication in English classes.

☞ Question: What do you think about the importance of nonverbal communication in English classes?

Importance	Teachers (No= 15)	Percentage (%)
Very important	13	87%
Important	1	6.5%
A little important	0	0%
Not important	1	6.5%

3.1.2. The reasons for teachers' using nonverbal communication when teaching English.

☞ Question: Why do you like to use nonverbal communication when teaching English?

Teachers' reasons	Teachers (No= 12)	Percentage (%)
a. Because it makes your lesson more interesting and animated	9	75%
b. Because it can help you save time	4	33.33%
c. Because your students like it	2	16.66%
d. Because it is of your habit	5	41.66%
e. Because it creates a natural and intimate atmosphere in class	6	50%
f. Because it makes your lesson more effective	8	83.33%

3.1.3. The difficulties teachers face in using nonverbal communication in English classes.

☞ *Question 1:* What are the difficulties you face in using nonverbal communication in English classes?

Difficulties	Teachers (No= 15)	Percentage (%)
a. Nonverbal communication is difficult to control	13	86.66%
b. Some of the nonverbal cues are easy to misunderstand	5	33.33%
c. Your students don't know the meanings of your nonverbal cues	4	26.66%
d. Your students come from different backgrounds	6	40%

3.1.5. The benefits students can get from their teachers' using nonverbal communication in English classes.

☞ *Question:* In your opinion, what can your students get benefits from your using nonverbal communication in English classes?

Teachers' ideas	Teachers (No= 15)	Percentage (%)
a. They will feel easier to understand the lesson.	10	66.66%
b. Your nonverbal communication motivates your students' studying English	11	73.33%
c. They learn how to express their ideas by nonverbal communication	8	53.33%
d. They become more confident when talking to others	9	60%
e. They make their ideas more effective and convincing	5	33.33%

3.2. Types of nonverbal communication teachers often use in English classes.

3.2.1. Nonverbal cues teachers often focus more on when teaching English

☞ *Question for teachers:* Which of the following nonverbal cues do you focus more on when teaching English?

Nonverbal cues	Teachers (No= 15)	Percentage (%)
a. Eye contact	15	100%
b. Gestures	13	86.66%
c. Facial expressions	8	60%
d. Postures	5	33.33%
e. Vocal intonation and cues	4	26.66%
f. Space and physical environment	3	20%
g. Distance	3	20%
h. Time	2	13.33%
i. Clothing	1	6.66%
j. Touch	0	0%

3.2.3. The most effective nonverbal cue for students' studying.

☞ *Question for teachers:* Which of the following nonverbal cues is the most effective for your students' studying?

Nonverbal cues	Teachers (No=15)	Percentage (%)	Students (No=250)	Percentage (%)
a. Eye-contact	4	26.66%	45	18%
b. Gestures	3	20%	56	22.4%
c. Facial expressions	3	20%	42	16.8%
d. Postures	0	0%	32	12.8%
e. Vocal intonation and cues	2	13.33%	31	12.4%
f. Space and physical environment	1	10%	24	9.6%
g. Distance	0	0%	0	0%
h. Time	0	0%	0	0%
i. Clothing	1	6.66%	10	4%
j. Touch	1	6.66%	0	0%

3.3. Students' attitudes toward their teachers' nonverbal communication in English classes.

3.3.1. The importance of teachers' nonverbal communication in English classes.

☞ *Question:* How important is your teachers' nonverbal communication in English classes?

3.3.2. The reasons for teachers' using nonverbal communication when teaching English.

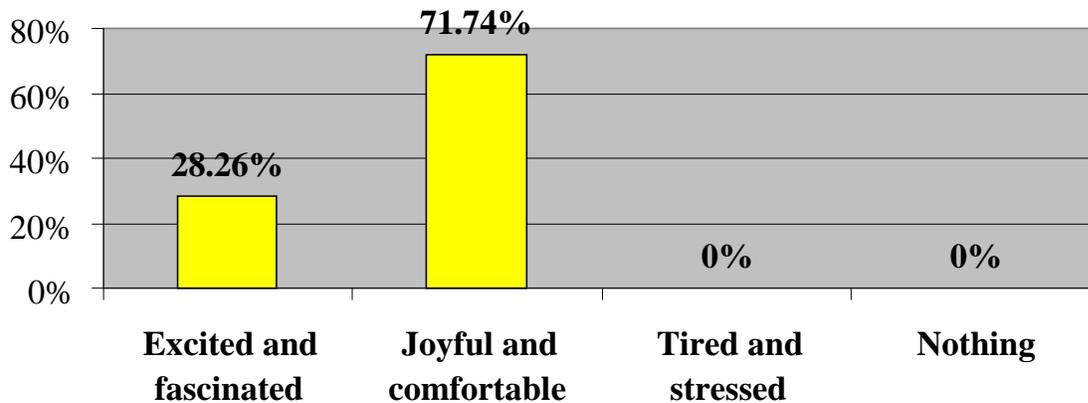
☞ *Question:* Why do you like your teachers to use nonverbal communication when teaching English?

Students' reasons	Students (No= 230)	Percentage (%)
a. Because it makes you feel easy to understand what your teachers mean	141	61.57%
b. Because it makes your lesson become very interesting	75	32.75%
c. Because it makes your teachers' instructions clearer	91	39.74%
d. Because you get information from your teachers more quickly	84	36.68%
e. It makes you feel more comfortable to study English	66	28.82%

3.3.3. Students' feelings when teachers use nonverbal communication well in English classes

☞ *Question:* How do you feel when your teachers use nonverbal communication well in English classes?

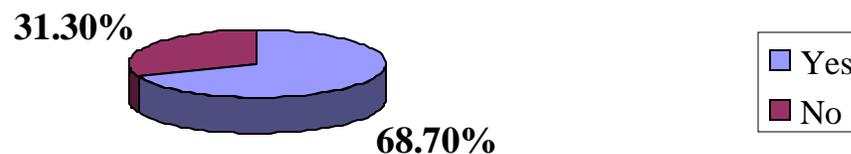
Students' feelings when teachers use nonverbal communication well in English classes



3.3.4. Students' understanding about teachers' nonverbal communication

☞ Question: Do you often understand your teachers' nonverbal communication?

Students' understanding about teachers' nonverbal communication



4.1. Some suggestions for teachers to make their nonverbal communication better

★ Question 1:

☞ *For teachers*: In terms of nonverbal communication, what do you do to make your lesson really effective?

☞ *For students*: In terms of nonverbal communication, what do you want your teachers to do to make the lesson really effective?

Ideas	Teachers (No=14)	Percentage (%)	Students (No=250)	Percentage (%)
a. Choose nonverbal cues which are easy to understand	8	85.71%	180	72%
b. Pay more attention to voice tone, pitch, volume	7	50%	100	40 %
c. Come to an agreement between nonverbal signals and their meanings at the beginning of the year	6	42.85%	85	34%
d. Use eye contact proactively	4	28.57%	70	28%

★ **Question 2:**

☞ *For teachers:* What should you do to increase the effectiveness of your using nonverbal communication in English classes?

☞ *For students:* In your opinion, what should your teachers do to increase the effectiveness of their using nonverbal communication in English classes?

Ideas	Teachers (No=14)	Percentage (%)	Students (No=250)	Percentage (%)
a. Combine the verbal message with the nonverbal one	12	85.71%	180	72%
b. Choose the suitable time to use nonverbal communication in English classes	9	67.28%	100	40%
c. Avoid using only one nonverbal cue in many different situations	7	50%	95	38%
d. Videotape themselves during the typical lesson to assess the verbal and nonverbal consistency	1	7,14%	40	16%

PART IV: CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that teachers' nonverbal communication is regarded as a crucial factor relating to the English learning and teaching process and affecting the learning outcome.

Firstly, one of the most important points is the teachers' and the students' awareness of teachers' nonverbal communication. According to the teachers, nonverbal communication plays a significant role in creating great motivation for students in English classes. In other words, most of the teachers took responsible for their nonverbal communication when teaching English. Also, the students showed their strong agreement with the importance of teachers' nonverbal communication in teaching and learning English.

Indeed, one of the main conclusions from the findings and discussion is that the vast majority of the teachers paid much attention to their nonverbal communication in English classes. This consciousness is extremely essential to motivate and encourage students to learn English more actively. However, the research also discloses some problems that the teachers often encounter during the process of using nonverbal communication. For example, some of the nonverbal cues are easy to understand, nonverbal communication is uncontrolled and spontaneous, the students come from different cultural backgrounds and they do not know the meanings of the teachers' nonverbal cues.

The second point is that there are many nonverbal aspects, in which ten nonverbal cues often taken into careful consideration by the teachers when teaching English are gestures, postures, eye-contact, facial expressions, vocal intonation and cues, space and physical environment, distance, time, clothing and touch. Through the questionnaires interviews and class observations, gestures, eye-contact, postures, facial expressions and vocal intonation and cues have their great significance by drawing much attention from the teachers because the effectiveness that brings to the development of EFL learning and teaching.

Thirdly, the research affirms the powerful impact of the teachers' nonverbal communication on both their teaching and students' feelings and learning in English classes. Using nonverbal

communication well encourages the teachers to try to maximize learning potential for as many students in the class as possible and hence, to make the environment in EFL classes increasingly pleasurable and interesting. The findings give the teachers a chance to identify and satisfy their students' needs and desires for using nonverbal communication in the classroom. In contrast, unsuitable nonverbal communication of the teachers raised some problems and had negative influence on students' feelings and attitudes toward learning English.

The students' comments on the ways the teachers use nonverbal communication in English classes are really a valuable source of information for the teachers to find out the best solution to suit the process of teaching and learning English.

Another general conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that most of the students had more motivation to learn English when the teachers knew how to create an effective lesson with their nonverbal communication in the classroom.

What is more, the research also gives out some suggestions of making the teachers' nonverbal communication better in the pedagogical environment. According to the teachers and students in some university in Ba Ria – Vung Tau, selecting nonverbal cues which are easy to understand, combining the verbal message with the nonverbal one, choosing the suitable time to perform nonverbal communication in English classes, paying attention to voice tone, pitch and volume are the most effective ways.

In conclusion, teachers' nonverbal communication is a very important part of communication. If the teachers want to have a successful communication with their students, they should pay more attention to their nonverbal behaviors, their use of nonverbal cues to get the effectiveness. It is interesting to realize that nonverbal communication is even important than the use of language in some particular situations because if the teachers do some wrong gestures before saying a word, they may hurt their students and reduce the effectiveness of the process of teaching and learning English. "Verbal communication is the shadow of nonverbal communication, nonverbal communication is the essence of life and verbal is just the jewelry." (Baltasar Gracian, 2002)

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