

Teacher's Nonverbal Immediacy Behaviour In Senior High School

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Abstract

Nonverbal communication in the classroom is as essential as verbal interaction in shaping effective teaching and learning. This study explored students' perceptions of their English teacher's nonverbal communication in class XI IPS 2 at SMAN 1 Pangale. The findings indicate that the teacher demonstrated effective nonverbal immediacy, which included neat and professional appearance, meaningful eye contact, supportive gestures, and frequent smiling. These behaviors contributed to creating a positive classroom atmosphere where students felt more comfortable, relaxed, confident, and engaged in the learning process. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The study population comprised students from classes XI IPS 1 and XI IPS 2, with a sample of 25 students from XI IPS 2. The results highlight the significant role of nonverbal communication in enhancing students' motivation, comprehension, and overall classroom participation.

Keywords: *Nonverbal Communication; Immediacy Behavior; Classroom Interaction*

Abstract

Komunikasi nonverbal di dalam kelas sama pentingnya dengan interaksi verbal dalam membentuk pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang efektif. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa terhadap komunikasi nonverbal guru Bahasa Inggris mereka di kelas XI IPS 2 di SMAN 1 Pangale. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru menunjukkan kedekatan nonverbal yang efektif, yang meliputi penampilan yang rapi dan profesional, kontak mata yang bermakna, gestur yang mendukung, dan sering tersenyum. Perilaku ini berkontribusi dalam menciptakan suasana kelas yang positif di mana siswa merasa lebih nyaman, rileks, percaya diri, dan terlibat dalam proses pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif, dengan data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Populasi penelitian terdiri dari siswa dari kelas XI IPS 1 dan XI IPS 2, dengan sampel 25 siswa dari XI IPS 2. Hasilnya menyoroti peran penting komunikasi nonverbal dalam meningkatkan motivasi, pemahaman, dan partisipasi kelas siswa secara keseluruhan.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Nonverbal; Perilaku Kedekatan; Interaksi di Kelas

Introduction

The development of a country is closely tied to education, as it produces quality human resources that drive economic, social, and political progress. Education involves two key actors, ip themselves with knowledge in psychology, character building, and students' learning preferences.

Many researchers have studied ways to support teachers in the teaching and learning process through methods, models, strategies, and techniques. Teaching is not only about delivering material but ensuring students understand and apply it. Given student diversity, teachers need effective strategies, including strong communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal, to make learning meaningful.

Communication fosters immediacy between teachers and students, helping achieve learning goals more effectively. Nonverbal behaviors such as smiling, nodding, or using gestures, alongside verbal behaviors like greeting students by name or engaging in conversations, create psychological closeness and encourage participation. This is particularly important in language learning, where communication and interaction are essential.

However, some high school is still revealed that many teachers focus only on methods and strategies, neglecting nonverbal reinforcement and students' perceptions. Since perception shapes how students interpret teachers' behavior, understanding it is crucial for effective teaching and improved learning outcomes. Therefore, examining students' perspectives and expectations toward teacher behavior can provide valuable recommendations for enhancing teaching strategies.

Matter and Method

Nonverbal communication refers to the exchange of messages without words, expressed through actions, behaviors, or personal attributes. Knapp and Hall (2002, in Maisarah, 2019) explain that unlike verbal communication, nonverbal communication conveys meaning through gestures, expressions, and other cues. Similarly, Marianne and Maida (1976) define it as behaviors beyond words that generate shared meaning among people in interaction.

Examples of nonverbal communication include waving, smiling, eye contact, or the use of accessories such as clothing or jewelry (Greene, 2003). Knapp (2013) also notes that nonverbal communication can reinforce verbal messages—for instance, pointing toward a parking lot while giving directions. Beyond transmitting information, nonverbal behaviors reveal emotions. As Doumanis and Economou (2019) emphasize, immediacy cues such as touch, movement, and facial expressions can reflect how a person feels. (Knapp et al., 2013) further observe that people often rely more on nonverbal cues to gauge emotions than on verbal expressions.

In education, nonverbal immediacy strengthens teacher–student relationships by allowing teachers to interpret students' feelings and respond appropriately. Research confirms its positive effect; (Wijaya, 2016) found that verbal and nonverbal immediacy positively influence student engagement and attendance. Nonverbal messages can be conveyed through symbolic actions, gestures, and behaviors that intentionally or unintentionally communicate meaning (Burleson, 2003; Canary, 2003). Unlike sign language or writing, which use words, nonverbal communication includes intonation, body language, and subconscious signals. In short, nonverbal communication conveys meaning through expressions, actions, or cues that often complement or even substitute verbal interaction.

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method, which was deemed appropriate for exploring social phenomena in a natural context. The focus of the study was to analyze and describe students' perceptions of their teachers' nonverbal immediacy

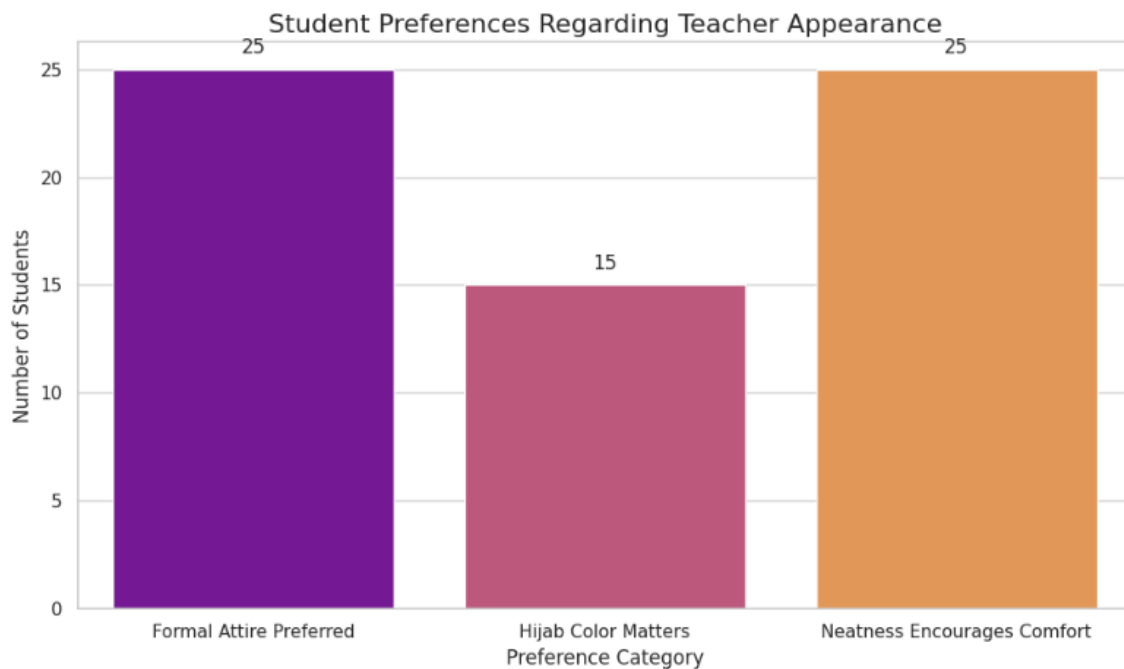
behaviors, emphasizing how these behaviors influence classroom interactions and the overall learning experience.

The participants of this study were students of SMAN 1 Pangale. The population included two classes, namely XI IPS 1 and XI IPS 2. From this population, the researcher selected class XI IPS 2 as the sample, consisting of 25 students. This class was chosen because it was closely related to the research focus and provided data relevant to the study. Eleventh-grade students were considered appropriate participants since they had completed two semesters of learning, which was deemed sufficient for them to provide informed perceptions of their teachers' nonverbal communication.

Research data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Non-participant observation was conducted to record the types and frequency of teachers' nonverbal immediacy and students' responses during English lessons. Structured interviews with students were used to explore their perceptions, with probing questions included to gain deeper insights. In addition, supporting documents such as attendance lists, test results, and student assignments were gathered to complement and validate the findings. The the data was analyzed by using interactive model by Miles and Huberman.

Result

A. Appearance

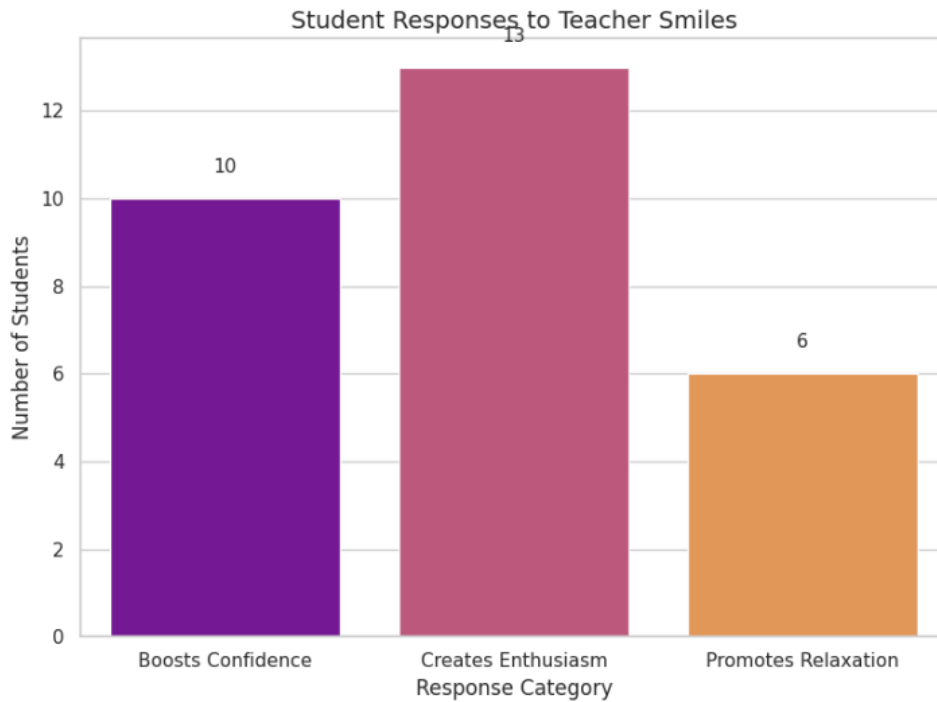


1. Formal Attire Preferred
 All 25 students expressed preference for teachers wearing neat, formal clothing (uniforms, batik, shirts).
2. Hijab Color Matters
 15 students disliked flashy-colored hijabs, finding them distracting during lessons.



3. Neatness Encourages Comfort
Students preferred teachers who wore clean, ironed clothes, as this made them feel comfortable and respected.

B. Smile



1. Boosts Confidence

10 students reported greater confidence in asking and answering questions when teachers smiled.

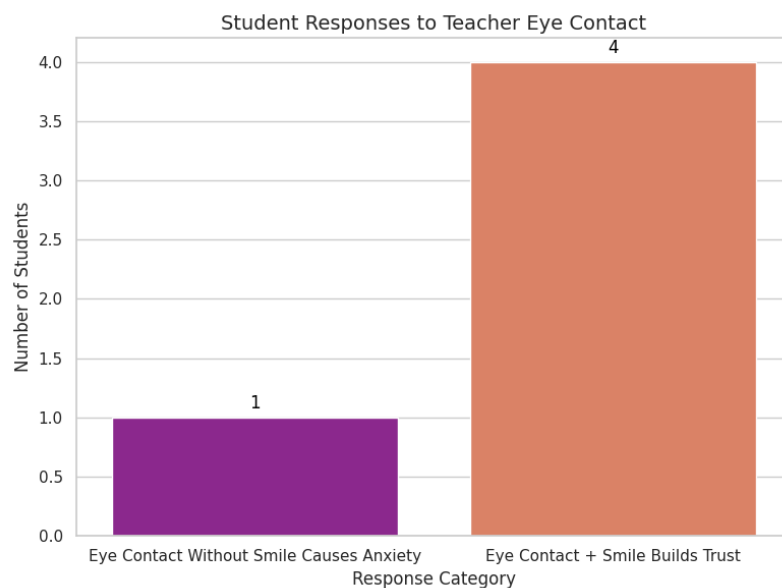
2. Creates Enthusiasm

9 students felt more motivated, and 4 others said they became more enthusiastic to engage in learning when teachers smiled.

3. Promotes Relaxation

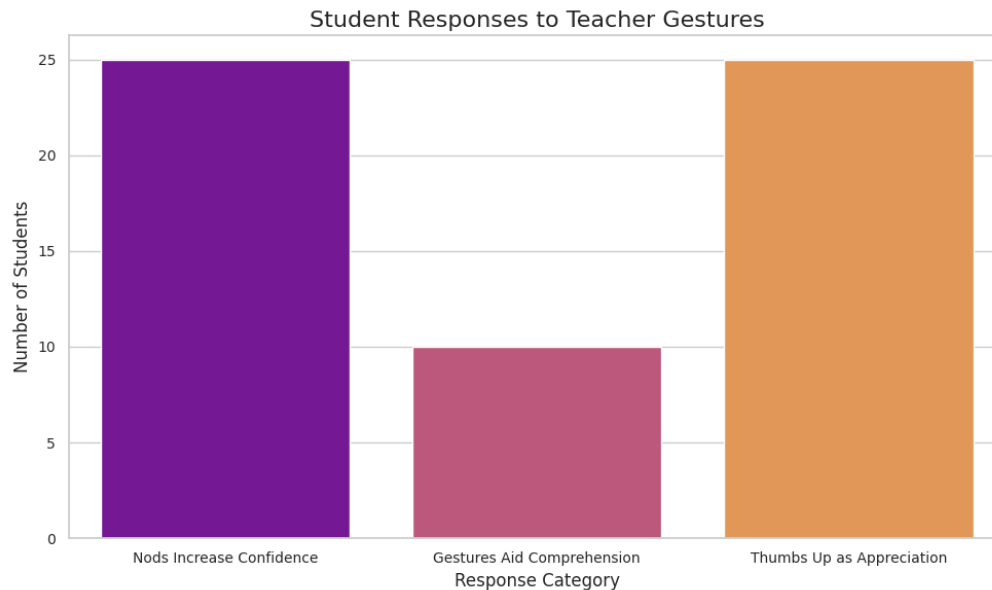
6 students stated that a teacher's smile reduced tension, making them feel welcome and less anxious when speaking or participating.

C. Eye Contact



1. **Eye Contact Without Smile Causes Anxiety**
Some students (e.g., S8) reported feeling nervous when the teacher made direct eye contact without smiling.
2. **Eye Contact + Smile Builds Trust**
4 students felt trusted, appreciated, and respected when teachers combined eye contact with a smile while listening to their answers.

D. Gesture



1. **Nods Increase Confidence**
All students reported that when teachers nodded during their answers, they felt encouraged, confident, and less nervous even if their answers were partly wrong.
2. **Gestures Aid Comprehension**
10 students found that gestures (e.g., raising fingers to indicate numbers) made lessons more memorable and easier to recall.
3. **Thumbs Up as Appreciation**
All 25 students said that a thumbs up (with verbal praise like “good” or “excellent”) made them feel appreciated, motivated, and more confident to participate again.

Discussion Appearance

Classroom observations conducted during two separate sessions revealed that students reacted positively to teachers who demonstrated a professional and coordinated sense of dress. Teachers who appeared neatly dressed—for example, wearing an official uniform paired with a hijab, matching accessories such as a watch, and simple footwear—were perceived as more approachable and credible. Students appeared more comfortable and engaged when teachers maintained a tidy, well-organized appearance. These findings were corroborated through triangulated data sources, including observation notes, interviews, and supporting documentation. Consistently, students emphasized their

preference for teachers who wore formal attire, such as collared shirts, ironed uniforms, and neatly presented clothing.

The data further showed that students had particular expectations regarding female teachers' *hijabs*. A majority preferred hijabs in colors that harmonized with the overall outfit, avoiding tones that were excessively bright or distracting. Approximately 15 of the 25 interviewed students expressed that vivid or flashy hijabs created discomfort, particularly when teachers stood in front of the blackboard, as such colors interfered with concentration. Jalil (2012) highlighted the psychological and cognitive influences of color on learning. Color selection has been found to shape attention, affect emotional states, and impact overall learning effectiveness. Overly bright colors, while stimulating, may overwhelm students' senses and reduce concentration. Jalil (2012) alongside Hsu (2010), underscored that colors such as red, blue, white, and green hold measurable effects on perception and behavior, thereby influencing learning outcomes.

This suggests that teachers should exercise careful consideration of their appearance, as attire contributes directly to classroom atmosphere. Clothing choices—including hijabs, uniforms, and accessories—are not merely aesthetic but pedagogical, as they foster or hinder student engagement. Putri (2018) similarly argued that student evaluations of instructional quality are linked to teachers' appearance. A professional image not only conveys discipline and respect but also supports the development of a positive learning climate.

This line of thought is echoed by Bukit (2020) who concluded that neat and professional appearance by teachers nurtures conducive learning conditions and raises student motivation. Likewise, Badriyani (2018) emphasized that appearance plays a foundational role in sustaining student interest in classroom activities. This aspect is particularly salient for high school students aged 15 to 18, who are entering adolescence and are acutely aware of issues related to style, fashion, and identity. In a cultural context shaped by digital trends such as "Outfit of the Day" (OOTD), students may form judgments about teachers based on appearance, which in turn shapes their willingness to engage. As Handayani (2018) observed, for adolescents, appearance is a marker of self-expression and value, making it a significant factor in student–teacher interaction.

In sum, the study underscores that teacher appearance goes beyond surface presentation, functioning as a nonverbal cue that affects motivation, attention, and respect. A professional, neat, and culturally mindful appearance serves as a bridge that enhances communication, strengthens authority, and creates a learning environment conducive to academic achievement.

Smile

The teacher's smile emerged as another essential nonverbal dimension influencing students' learning experience. Across the three instruments, smiling was consistently associated with increased student confidence, enthusiasm, and comfort. When teachers smiled while responding to students' questions, learners became more active participants. In one instance, a student reported feeling confident enough to pose a question because the teacher's smile conveyed warmth and receptiveness, subsequently encouraging peers to engage.

Students repeatedly noted that teachers who smiled during interactions fostered feelings of trust and respect. They described smiling teachers as approachable and friendly, reducing the sense of hierarchy that often inhibits communication. Several students stated that a smile from the teacher diminished nervousness when asked to

present answers on the board. These responses aligned who identified the smile as a fundamental expression of friendliness, which signals acceptance and reduces interpersonal barriers between students and teacher (Hasanat, 1996, p:32).

Additionally, students described smiling teachers as those who not only conveyed kindness but also transmitted motivation. In interviews (Appendix 2, Code I8D), learners explicitly associated teacher smiles with increased enthusiasm for participating in future lessons. They equated the smile with acknowledgment of effort, which made them feel valued. This sentiment resonates with Richmond, McCrosky, and Hikson's (2007) findings, which demonstrated that smiles encourage positive perceptions across all educational levels, from early childhood to graduate studies.

The communicative power of a smile has also been emphasized by Hsu (2010, p188), who characterized it as the "best bridge" between teachers and students. Smiles transform classrooms into welcoming spaces where learners feel relaxed and willing to engage in intellectual risk-taking. This evidence suggests that the simple act of smiling is not merely a formality but a pedagogical strategy that communicates encouragement, cultivates rapport, and facilitates learning.

Eye Contact

Eye contact represented another form of nonverbal immediacy, with effects that depended heavily on context. The data revealed a clear distinction between eye contact accompanied by a smile and eye contact without supportive expression. Students reported that when teachers made direct eye contact without smiling, they felt intimidated, nervous, or even reluctant to articulate answers. Such interactions often led to hesitation and silence, as students interpreted stern eye contact as disapproval.

In contrast, eye contact paired with a smile yielded opposite results. Students were observed responding with composure and confidence when teachers maintained eye contact while encouraging them with a smile. This combination communicated attention and appreciation, reinforcing students' sense of being valued. Four interview participants explicitly stated that they felt trusted and respected when teachers listened attentively with direct eye contact and supportive facial expressions.

Eye contact is considered a symbol of attentiveness and validation. Khoirudin (2012) emphasized that sustained eye contact reflects engagement and conveys respect. In pedagogical settings, it communicates that teachers are not merely instructing but actively listening, thus fostering student confidence. Eye contact thus acts as a powerful motivator, helping learners feel acknowledged, respected, and encouraged to participate more fully in class discussions.

Gesture

Gestures represented a multifaceted tool of nonverbal communication, supporting comprehension, motivation, and classroom interaction. Three primary types of gestures were observed as particularly effective: nodding, giving a thumbs up, and using hand signals to represent concepts.

The first gesture, nodding, served as subtle yet powerful reinforcement. When teachers nodded while students delivered answers, learners felt affirmed, even if their responses were not entirely correct. Rather than discouraging students, nodding conveyed encouragement and validation, allowing them to continue contributing confidently. This aligns with Knapp's theory of nonverbal communication (Prasanti and Karimah, 2018

p,195), which recognized gestures as functional substitutes for verbal reinforcement. A nod communicates approval without interrupting, thereby sustaining participation.

The second gesture, the thumbs up, functioned as explicit recognition. During observations, students were seen smiling, relaxing, and even thanking the teacher after receiving this gesture along with verbal praise such as “good” or “excellent. Interviews confirmed that students felt valued when their efforts were recognized this way, and they were more motivated to answer subsequent questions. Gestures like these act as reward signals, stimulating motivation and shaping classroom engagement (Apriliani, 2018 p,190).

The third type of gesture involved using fingers to represent numerical concepts—for example, raising two fingers while saying “two causes” or three fingers when explaining “three types.” Students responded by nodding simultaneously, showing comprehension and retention. Interviews further indicated that such visual reinforcement enhanced recall, as students associated the material with the teacher’s hand movements communication model underscores this, estimating that nonverbal elements account for over half of communicative meaning, compared to verbal language (7%) and vocal tone (38%) (Hsu, 2010, p.200). Similarly, Tai (2014) stressed that gestures are indispensable in language learning contexts, as they allow abstract information to be conveyed more concretely and memorably.

Collectively, these observations and interviews highlight that gestures serve not only as visual aids but as psychological reinforcements, making students feel appreciated and fostering deeper comprehension. Gestures bridge the gap between abstract explanation and tangible understanding, ensuring learning is both engaging and accessible.

Conclusion

The findings from this study confirm that nonverbal immediacy behaviors—appearance, smile, eye contact, and gesture—constitute vital dimensions of teaching practice. Each element influences students differently: appearance affects comfort and motivation; smiles foster trust and enthusiasm; eye contact conveys respect and validation; and gestures enhance understanding and reinforce participation. Together, these nonverbal cues contribute to a classroom atmosphere that is supportive, engaging, and conducive to effective learning.

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