

## EFL LEARNER'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN CLASSROOM CONVERSATION

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### Abstract

Communication is the way people deliver a message from the speaker to the receiver. Nonverbal communication is a form of silent language is used to deliver the message without using words. Nonverbal communication has essential roles in classroom interaction. Many researchers did a study about nonverbal communication in the teaching process. However, the study of EFL learner's perspectives on nonverbal communication received little attention. In relation, the recent study would like to investigate the EFL learner's perspective toward non-verbal communication in classroom communication. In this research, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative approach with the questionnaire. EFL learners at Tidar University were adopted as participants in this research. The result shows that Nonverbal communications in the form of eye contact, mimics, and body language play essential roles in classroom conversation as the source of motivation and concentration. The importance of nonverbal communication can be aware for the teacher to create a better environment in classroom interactions.

**Keywords:** *communication, nonverbal communication, classroom interaction*

### Abstrak

Komunikasi adalah bagaimana cara seseorang menyampaikan pesan dari pembicara kepada penerima. Komunikasi non-verbal adalah bentuk bahasa tersirat yang digunakan untuk menyampaikan pesan tanpa menggunakan kata-kata. Komunikasi non-verbal mempunyai peran penting di dalam interaksi kelas. Banyak peneliti melakukan penelitian tentang komunikasi non-verbal. Tetapi penelitian tentang perspektif pelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa asing masih mendapat sedikit perhatian. Berhubungan dengan hal itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengobservasi perspektif pelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing terhadap penggunaan komunikasi non-verbal di dalam komunikasi kelas. Pada penelitian ini, peneliti menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan kuesioner. Pelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing di Universitas Tidar menjadi partisipan pada penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi nonverbal dalam bentuk kontak mata, mimik wajah, dan bahasa tubuh memiliki peran penting dalam percakapan kelas sebagai sumber motivasi dan konsentrasi. Pentingnya komunikasi nonverbal dapat menjadi pengetahuan bagi guru untuk menciptakan interaksi dalam kelas yang lebih baik.

**Kata kunci:** *komunikasi, komunikasi non-verbal, interaksi kelas*

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is the key to human interaction as we are living in society. Adler & Proctor (2014) stated that communication is "talking to one another." The assumption is that we need to communicate because we physically need others to provide stimulation. This can be implied by the Meriam Dictionary, which defines communication as a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a standard system of symbols, signs, or behavior. It can be defined that communication as the act of giving, receiving, or exchanging the idea or information so that the message is understood by each other. There are several elements of the communication process – sender, message, receiver, feedback, and context. Communication goes beyond the level of just words; it can occur when there are no words at all, in the form of nonverbal communication.

As the statement of Knapp & Hall (2007) states, there are two variables to convey the intention of humans for communicating – verbal

and nonverbal communication. To successfully communicate, we need to compete in both verbal and non-verbal communication. Nonverbal communication has essential roles in daily human life. As human beings, we depend heavily on it. Edward Hall (1959) called nonverbal communication "silent language" since language becomes distinctly human through its nonverbal dimension. According to Miller (1988), nonverbal communication is communication without words. "It includes facial expressions, eyes, touching and tone of voice, as well as less obvious messages such as dress, postures and spatial distance between two or more people" (Miller, 1988, p. 3). Nonverbal communication refers to transferring the information using body language, which is not using verbal language.

As stated above, nonverbal language plays a vital role in human interactions, including in-classroom conversation. Classroom interaction creates the opportunity to negotiate, provide students with increased chances for input comprehension of the target language, and acquire

target discourse conventions, and practice higher-level academic, communicative skills (Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987). In the EFL classroom, the process of teaching and learning is always mediated through language. The fact shows that the teacher often complains about the lack of attention, discipline, and many communication breakdowns between teacher and student or student and student.

It can be implied by the words of Ledbury et al. (2004), who state that the teacher often forgets about the importance of non-verbal communication in their own and their students' performance. Based on this problem, the study aimed to investigate the perspective of EFL learners through the importance of using nonverbal communication in classroom conversation.

Canan P. Zeki (2009) researched the importance of nonverbal communication in classroom management. The result shows that nonverbal communication can be an essential source of motivation and concentration for students' learning and a tool for

taking and maintaining attention. Most students indicated how motivated they become due to the teacher's eye contact, mimics, and gestures feeling comfortable, confident, and meaningful. The study suggests that teachers should be aware of the importance of nonverbal communication and use it to create a more motivating, comfortable, confident environment. Research conducted by Michael Nigussie (2015) about the insight into nonverbal communication for TEFL teachers and learners suggests that nonverbal communication has a vital role in the competency of foreign language communicative. However, little attention has been given to practical uses to help English learners incorporate this essential element into their learning process and conversations.

Fatemeh Behjat, Samaneh Bayat, and Ali Asghar Kargar (2014) investigate the importance of nonverbal communication in the Iranian EFL classroom. The results showed high positive attitudes through facial expressions and eye contact of the teacher as two forms

of nonverbal communication in Iranian students' second language learning. Another study related to nonverbal communication in EFL was conducted by Fatemeh Bambaerou and Nasrin Shokrpour (2017). The authors studied the impact of the teachers' non-verbal communication on success in teaching. The result revealed a strong relationship between the teacher's quality, amount, and method of using non-verbal communication during the teaching-learning process.

## **METHOD**

A qualitative approach is used in this study. According to Quinn and Cochran (2007), qualitative research aims to recognize other facets of social existence and distinguishes them by producing terms as evidence for examination. The qualitative approach is the method that explores and understands the personal meaning that is as the social. The researcher collected the data by giving a questionnaire to the EFL learners of the English Department at Tidar University. Based on Cam & Tran (2017) questionnaire is a

beneficial method of collecting because researchers can reach many participants and respondents in a short time, and it does not need to cost too much.

The procedures in collecting the data were adapting the questionnaire from Canan P. Zekki (2009) and Fatemeh Behjat (2014), asking the participant to fulfill the questionnaire, and finally collecting the answer from the participant. After the data is collected, it will be analyzed. This study aims to investigate the EFL learner of the English Department at Tidar University's perspective. According to Cresswell (2009), an investigation is focused on the meaning of the individual and presenting the situation as complex.

The purpose of this study is to investigate EFL Learner' perspectives. According to Cresswell (2009), the investigation is focused on the meaning of the individual and presenting the situation as complex. To reach the goal of this study, there are four questions adopted which solicited the information on body language, facial expression, and eye

contact. The formats used are scale questions and multiple choices questions. The scales were coded as (Strongly Agree =5, Agree =4, Uncertain=3, Disagree =2, Strongly disagree =1). The questions adopted were:

1. Facial expressions are considered one of the essential techniques in class.
2. Eye contact is considered one of the essential techniques in class.
3. What are the student perceptions toward the meaning of eye contact?
4. What are the student perceptions on the meaning of facial expressions (mimics) and gestures (body language)?

Sixty participants contributed to the process of collecting the data. The subjects of this research were EFL learners of the English Department at Tidar University.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Findings*

In this study, the author will learn about EFL Learner's perspective on the importance of non-verbal communication in the classroom conversation. After computing percentages and analyzing the data, the results were presented in frequencies. The following tables summarize the students' responses in terms of the importance of non-verbal communication.

**Table 1: Data of response token in the questionnaire**

No.	Question	Response				
		Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Uncertain (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1.	Facial expressions are considered one of the essential techniques in class.	1,7%	6,7%	8,3%	45%	38,3%
2.	Eye contact is considered one of the most important techniques in class.	1,7%	1,7%	10%	46,7%	40%

The table shows the various responses that participants have given. In the first part, which consists of table 1, the researcher considered

facial expression and eye contact as the essential techniques in class. In this part, the researcher uses some ranges for the answer. There are five

answers, number 1 if the participants strongly disagree with the statement, two if the participants disagree with the statement, three if the participants are uncertain with the statement, four if the participants agree with the statement, and five if the participants strongly agree with the statement.

In results, table 1 shows that 1,7% or one person strongly disagrees if facial expressions are considered the most essential technique in the classroom, and 6,7% or four people disagree with the statement. Next, 8,3% or 5 participants are uncertain that facial expressions are the most important technique in class. Besides, 45% or 27 participants agree with the statement, and 38.3% or 23 people strongly agree that facial expressions

are considered the most important technique used in the classroom.

Next, the author states that eye contact is considered one of the most important techniques in class. The result shows that 1,7% or 1 participant strongly disagree with the statement, and 1,7% or 1 participant also disagree if eye contact is considered one of the most important techniques in class. And then, there are 10% or 6 participants who are uncertain about the statement given. The other perception is shown by 46,7% or 28 participants who agree and 40% or 24 participants who strongly agree if eye contact is considered one of the most important techniques in the classroom.

**Table 2: Data of respondent token in the questionnaire**

No.	Question	Response				
		Source of motivation and concentration	Source for taking and maintaining	Helps the student understand the topic better	Reflect the mood of the lecture	Display lecture's confidence or lack of confidence
3.	What are the student perceptions toward the meaning of eye contact?	33,3%	10%	20%	11,7%	25%

**Table 3: Data of respondent token in the questionnaire**

No.	Question	Response				
		Source for motivation, enthusiasm, and	A source for taking and maintain attention	Helps the student understand the topic better	Reflect the mood of the lecture	Display lecture's confidence or lack of confidence
4.	What are the student perceptions on the meaning of facial expressions (mimics) and gestures (body language)?	51.7%	18,3%	13,3%	8,3%	8,3%

Subsequently, in the next part, the researcher asks the participant about the meaning of eye contact, mimics, and body language. In table 2, there are five choices provided by the researcher; source of motivation and concentration, the source for taking and maintaining, helps the student understand the topic better, reflects the mood of the lecture, and displays the lecture's confidence or lack of confidence. As a result, table 2 shows that 33.3% or 31 participants choose eye contact as the source of motivation and concentration. 10% or 6 participants defined eye contact as the source for taking and maintaining, then 20% or 12 participants chose eye contact to help the student to understand the topic better. Next, 11.7% or seven persons defined it as the reflection of the mood of the lecture, and the last

25% or 15 participants chose eye contact to display the lecturer's confidence or lack of confidence.

Afterward, in table 3, the author also gives the questions about the meaning of the lecturer's mimics and body language. There are five choices given; source of motivation, enthusiasm, and confidence. The source for taking and maintaining attention helps the student understand the topic better, reflects the mood of the lecture, and displays the lecture's confidence or lack of confidence. As a result, table 4 shows that 51.7% or 31 participants defined mimics and body language from the lecture as the source of motivation, enthusiasm, and confidence. Then, 18,3% or 11 participants chose mimics and body language as the source for taking and maintaining attention; 13,3% or eight

persons stated it could help the student understand the topic better. Next, 8,3% or 5 participants defined that mimics and body language reflect the lecture's mood. The other

### *Discussion*

According to Miller (1988), nonverbal communication is communication without words. "Nonverbal communication includes facial expressions, eyes, touching and tone of voice, as well as less obvious messages such as dress, postures and spatial distance between two or more people" (Miller, 1988, p. 3). Research suggests that nonverbal communication has a vital role in the competency of foreign language communication. This research proves this kind of theory. The result shows that EFL learners at Tidar University agree that facial expressions and eye contact are considered the most important techniques used in classroom interaction.

The use of eyes and facial expressions is considered a disciplinary function in most sources and has many related functions that help teachers manage classrooms. It

participant with the percentage 8,3% or five people defined it can display the lecture's confidence or lack of confidence.

provides social information to the person whom you want to talk to. Gower and Walters (1983) describe the primary eye contact uses in the classroom are to show a student who is talking to the teacher is taking notice; to check the people's concentration; to indicate a student that you want to talk or to do something to him; to encourage someone contributions while trying to elicit ideas; a teacher knows students have something to say by looking at them; and to hold the students' attention not being addressed and encouraging them to listen to those doing the talking and to maintain attention (Synder,1988). The use of eye, mimics, and gestures are also believed to help establish rapport; a teacher who never looks students in the eye seems to lack confidence and gives a sense of insecurity for the student (Gower and

Walters, 1983). Similarly, Pollitt (2006) also indicates that eye contact is an essential key because when the teacher is speaking and does not look at the students, it shows a lack of confidence in oneself; the teacher may have problems with discipline. The research shows that EFL learners in Tidar University prove Gower and Walters's, Snyder's, and Pollitt's theories. Most university students define eye contact, mimics, and facial expression as the source of motivation, concentration, and enthusiasm. They mostly perceive all of these non-verbal communications as a source of taking and maintaining motivation. Also, it can display the confidence of the lecture.

## CONCLUSION

Non-verbal communication has essential roles in classroom

interaction. The university student shows how motivated and enthusiastic they are if the lecture applies eye contact, body language, and mimics when they communicate in the classroom. The teacher's non-verbal communication creates an atmosphere in classroom interaction to understand the topic better. Teachers are recommended to be aware of the importance of non-verbal communication to create a more motivating, comfortable, confident environment in the classroom conversation. The researcher suggested to others researchers to put detailed aspects of each nonverbal language on the research instrument.

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