

## Nonverbal Communication (NVC) and teacher presence in collaborative online learning

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### Abstract

Communication process requires a powerful combination of verbal and nonverbal process that is one of the abilities that every teacher needs to master. In communication, the estimation of sixty-five to seventy percent of the message is received by nonverbal and only thirty to thirty-five percent by verbal communication. This research seeks to analyze the effect of nonverbal communication by secondary teachers on the motivation and presence of students in a collaborative online learning environment. The information was gathered by questionnaires and interviews from both instructors and learners. The results showed that Nonverbal Communication can be an essential source of inspiration and attention for the learning process of students and a medium to attract their attention. Relying on the research outcomes that show the important role of Nonverbal Communication (NVC) in the teaching and learning process teachers by using the appropriate NVC types, eventually play a critical role during online collaborative teaching which can affect students' motivation and higher collaborative learning participation. In order to accurately convey learning content to students, teachers will have to improve and expand positive interactions.

**Keywords:** online learning, social presence, teaching presence, engagement, motivation, Nonverbal Communication

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### The role of nonverbal communication in education during pandemic

Online learning is an up-to-date subject for all of the researchers and also for teachers in those days since the entire World is in pandemic because of Covid-19 since the early of 2020. This rapid change in education has had serious effects on learning such as decreasing motivation of students, lack of collaborative learning, and interaction between the teachers and students. Over a long period of time, when we speak about human communication, just language comes to our mind instantly, whereas nonverbal communication is widely overlooked (Manusov, 2016; Mehrabian, 1981). Communication theorists believe that

verbal messages are expressed in the meaning of words, while non-verbal messages are passed on beyond the certain meaning of the words, and they show mostly feelings, personalities and points of view. Nonverbal communication actually plays a major part in the teaching process of learning (Bunglowala & Bunglowala, 2015, p. 371). Immediate cues of the NVC for example eye contact, smiling, the pose of the body, gestures and use of physical space enhances learning and interestingness (Andersen et al., 1979). According to Devito (2007) and Richmond and McCroskey (2000), the teacher needs to know and possess all methods of communication to develop successful teaching and achieve ideal learning success because they are mutually complementary. Indeed, the NVC influences the efficiency of the instructor's verbal communication. A lack of NVC by teachers, especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, was also identified as an important challenge for students (Khalil et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced life in all aspects, especially in education. After it gets worst, the global lockdown turned in schools' lockdown. This lockdown ended in a stressful situation for instructors and students with extremely limited options. All schools were shifted to online learning within days without preparation to this online learning situation. This huge unplanned shift from traditional learning to a completely online learning environment has changed the learning/teaching methods and priorities of schools and teachers in delivering the courses for their students (Khalil et al., 2020).

Al Tawil, R. (2019), Richardson, Maeda, Lv, & Caskurlu (2017) expressed that the interaction among learners is very important in online environments for student achievement. Garrison et al., (2000) found the scheme of the survey community, which identifies three basic elements (cognitive presence, social presence and educational presence) is accustomed to deliver a significant learning experience. While social presence plays a significant role under normal circumstances, its position shifts significantly during the pandemic period in an epidemic outbreak (LimanKaban, 2021). In the expected results of learning, communication models used by secondary teachers play a strategic role (Allen et al., 2006) and it has also been proven that the results of the immediate NVC are positively associated with higher levels of student motivation.

### **The relationship between NVC and social presence in collaborative online learning environment**

The growing collaboration among learners' impact degree to which learners view themselves as true individuals, in other words, it affects their feelings of social presence positively (Hackman & Walker, 1990). Students suggest greater enjoyment in the classroom and improved expectations of having learned from the instructor as teachers attempt to use immediate non-verbal communication techniques (Griffin, 1985). In particular, teachers' use of the NVC is interesting because in the early years of secondary school, children begin to understand, process and use the NVC. Teachers provide role models for the NVC but if the NVC of the teacher is different from his or her verbal communication, the true meaning of the communication can be difficult for children to process. The NVC in interactive online

learning affects the motivation, level of commitment and understanding of students

The quality of learning in children depends intensely on the quality of interaction between themselves and the teacher, and as children's lexicon and level of understanding are restricted, NVC shapes much of this interaction. Body language can be an efficient attitude and affirmation method for representing (Wolfgang, 1977). Using your eyes, imitations and movements help teachers to create relationship with learners; Marshall and Rossman (1989) also added that to build a persuasive yet not confusing effect on the students, teachers need to coordinate their body language, eye contact, speaking voice and appearances. The objective of these studies was to conduct an investigation into how nonverbal communication (NVC) and teacher presence in collaborative online learning can effect on students' motivation and learning outcomes in secondary school.

The goal of this study is to gain an understanding of the nonverbal communication and teacher presence effects on collaborative online learning environments. In line with the objective of this study aimed to answer the research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between NVC and social presence in collaborative online learning environment?
2. Bearing in mind the lack of body language, is Nonverbal Communication which relates to teacher' and learners' perception, feelings, and characteristics presents in an online learning environment?
3. How does NVC in interactive online learning affect the motivation, level of commitment and understanding of students?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research methods were selected in this study. The study used interview questions as the instrument for obtaining data. The researchers developed the questionnaire and interview questions by adopting and adjusting previous researchers' questionnaires.

### **Setting and Procedures**

Ten English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are the total number of participants (female: 6, male: 4), they are currently teaching online. The questions of the semi-structured interview were administered through zoom meetings. Each meeting took 15 minutes.

### **Participants**

For this study, ten EFL teachers and ten students in private secondary schools were interviewed and answered the questionnaire. 60 percent of the participants' teachers were women and 40 percent were men. %12,5 of the participants had 1-3 years, 25% of the participants had 3-5 years, 25% of the participants had 5-10 years, 12,5% of the participants had 10-15 years and 25% of the participants had more than 15 years' experiences, also their six students in 3rd grade was interviewed. Fourteen Likert scale questions were asked in the questionnaire. Teachers and students' interviews were conducted in a one-on-one question. Each interview took approximately 15 minutes. 50 percent of the participant students were female and 50 percent were male. Their ages were between 9 and 10.

### **Data collection**

The semi-structured interview questions in this research were built by the researchers. The questions were selected and adapted from three different survey which are Nonverbal Communication in Text Oriented, Asynchronous Online Education by Al Tawil, R. (2019), But What about Nonverbal Communication?, Motivation as the Mediator in Relationship between Non- verbal Communication of Sindhi/Urdu Language Teachers and Student Learning Outcomes by Ismail et al., (2020). Teachers answered interview questions. Teachers were not guided in any way during the interview. The goal of the interviews was conducting the knowledge and ideas of teachers regarding the topic.

In addition, the researcher was conduct interviews with students to look at the content of this research from students' perspectives. The researchers asked students to explain their feeling regarding to topic. Students were answered interview questions without guidance. The goal of the interviews was gaining more in-depth understanding of the topic from both perspectives. In the same manner, teachers were answered questionnaires with Likert scale. The goal of the questionnaires was conducting the knowledge and beliefs of the teachers regarding thetopic.

### **Instruments**

A comprehensive method, including three distinct indicators, was used to measure the opinions of teachers about Nonverbal Communication and their presence in interactive online learning, as stated earlier. The first indicator referred to- Interview Questions for students includes 8 items and requires students to express their thoughts on how Nonverbal Communication is important for interaction and collaboration in online learning and how the social presence of teachers while using the correct NVC types influence the engagement of learners via open-ended interview questions in learning process. The second indicator referred to –Interview Questions for Teachers includes 7 items and requires teachers to state their thoughts toward the importance of Nonverbal communication in collaborative online teaching, the effects of using appropriate NVC types on students' motivation, and their tactic for overcoming the NVC types of barriers in online teaching.

### **Data Analysis**

Data interpretation has been used to describe the qualitative data obtained from the results of interviews regarding students' and teachers' point of views. As Miles and Huberman (1994) stated the qualitative approach includes the definition, coding, identification, classification and categorization of the key themes in the data.

### **The Interview Questions for Students' results**

Data from the 'Interview Questions for Students' revealed two major themes based on the research questions as follows:

- 1.Nonverbal Communication (eye contact, tone of voice, and facial expressions) and its impact on the level of understanding.
2. Nonverbal Communication and its effect on the level of motivation.

Theme 1: Students' perceptions regarding the effect of Nonverbal Communication types on comprehension level generated two codes. 2 students reported that the teacher's speed does not affect their comprehension of the topics. Speed of speaking is one of the voice aspects that besides tone and pitch are particularly important to communication. 4 students reported that the teacher's speed affects their comprehension of the topics. They declared that their comprehension level decrease based on the teacher's speaking speed.

St1: "When my teacher talks fast in the online lessons, sometimes I can't understand the topic clearly."

St6: "I can't understand anything because the voice comes like a song"

Theme 2: Students' perceptions regarding the effect of Nonverbal Communication types on motivation level generated one theme. All 6 students noticed that the eye contact and facial expressions of teachers are a source of inspiration for them to learn. The lack of teachers' eye contacts non-intentional or intentionally reflected negatively and positively in students' answers:

St1: "When my teacher doesn't look at, he camera or she turn off the camera I feel bad!"

St2: "I feel the teacher doesn't care about us. I can't concentrate on the lesson."

St5: "It is motivational for me. Because I understand better, and it motivates me to be more active in class."

St6: "It is motivational because in online lessons internet is bad and I can't hear something but when teacher uses his/her body language I can understand."

### **The Interview Questions for Teachers' results**

The Interview Questions for Teachers' results indicated two key themes based on the research questions:

- 1.The importance of using Nonverbal Communication
- 2.The effects of NVC on the level of students' motivation
- 3.Tactics for overcoming Nonverbal Communication barriers

Theme 1: Teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of using Nonverbal Communication in collaborative interaction in online learning. All 5 teachers reported that Nonverbal Communication is essential for collaborative interaction in online learning. They believe that NVC types can be considered as a tool pack to take the students' attention. NVC takes a key role to show the teachers' presence and meanwhile to keep the students' interaction and collaboration high.

T1: "When we explain ourselves, we mostly use proper body language to for making our practices powerful and this is also important for taking the students attention, sending them some signals for directing their attention to right point in the lesson and having the collaborative interaction."

T2: "NVC is essential to cover this gap and show the presence of teacher to keep the interaction between teacher and students collaboratively."

Theme 2: Teachers' perceptions regarding the effects of NVC on the level of students' motivation. All 5 teachers stated that NVC types help the instructor to keep the students interactive, engaged, and motivated in online lessons. It assists teachers to increase the learners' perception and keep the atmosphere of the class much more dynamic.

T4: "It is very essential to engage the learners by using nonverbal language to maintain their attention."

T5: "If the teacher uses NVC skills not effectively, students don't feel the teacher's social presence and their motivation in collaborative learning will be decrease."

Theme 3: Teachers' perceptions regarding the tactics for overcoming Nonverbal Communication barriers. All 5 teachers indicated that to provide the friendly learning environment teachers shall improve their technology skills for teaching in online classes. Using different kinds of Web 2.0 tools can be keep the class and students collaboratively active.

T2: "Third, teachers can use different Web 2.0 tools such as avatars, badges, icons to increase NVC by symbols."

Based on the analysis the advantages of using Nonverbal Communication efficiently by teachers in their online collaborative learning environment are increasing the student's motivation and presence and developing the learning achievements. To interpret the quantitative data obtained from surveys, statistical analysis was used. The questionnaire was designed to verify and measure the results of the interview, two variants of the same survey offering a more detailed overview of the research. Answers have been compiled for graphical representation and analysis.

50% of respondents partially agree Nonverbal Communication exists in online learning. 50% of respondents agree that Nonverbal communication is important in the profession of teaching with students in online learning. 62, 5% of respondents strongly agree Nonverbal Communication (NVC) is essential for collaborative interaction in online learning and 87.5% strongly agree in order to express more positive emotions in online learning, recognizing Nonverbal Communication by teachers is important.

75% of respondents strongly agree teachers' Nonverbal Communication affects students' motivation and achievement. While 50% of respondents agree there is a significant relationship between teachers' Nonverbal Communication and learning outcomes in online learning 62.5% of respondents strongly agree there is a significant relationship between student motivation and learning outcomes in online learning and in similarly 62.5% of respondents strongly agree there is a significant relationship between teachers' Nonverbal Communication and students' social presence in online learning.

75% of respondents strongly agree teachers' Nonverbal Communication can affect the students' collaboration degree with their friends, Nonverbal Communication affects the students' level of engagement in collaborative online learning and teacher's social presence by using the appropriate NVC effect on students' interaction in collaborative online learning. 50% of respondents strongly agree students' NVC can motivate teachers to teach effectively

in online sessions. Derived from the analysis the highest score proves that teachers' recognition of their Nonverbal Communication in order to express more positive emotions in their online learning is very important. Similarly, it shows teachers' Nonverbal Communication can affect the students' level of engagement in collaborative online learning.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was demonstrating the relation between Nonverbal Communication (NVC) and teacher presence in collaborative online learning in secondary schools. Notably, recent studies have not focused on the nonverbal communication in online learning a lot, this gap is tried to be filled in this study. Firstly, Research Question 1 evaluated the relationship between NVC and social presence in collaborative online learning environment. In the review of the literature, little evidence was found to connect nonverbal communication and teachers' presence in collaborative online learning environment. Furthermore, the gathered data in this study shows that there is a significant relationship between teachers' nonverbal communication and students' social presence in online learning. The results in this study indicate that there was a significant correlation between teachers' NVC and social presence of students in online learning environment. As a result of this study, Nonverbal Communication (NVC) is essential for collaborative interaction in online learning, match this mentioned in earlier studies of some specific nonverbal communication types should be useful to decrease collaborative interaction (Negrón& Antonio Jiménez, 2008; LimanKaban, 2019). As Gower and Walters (1983) and Ledbury et al. (2004) suggested, eye contact can be used to verify when anyone is focusing, to convey to the student who talks to the instructor and to promote contributions and involvement. Students also stated that the facial expressions of teachers make them feel happy or unhappy, which is consistent with the views of Ergin and Birol (2005) if a person looks you in the eye, it can be interpreted as caring for you or interested in you, making you feel valuable.

Second, Research Question 2 evaluated whether NVC presents in an online learning environment or not. From the data in Figure 1, there is no clear answer for this research question. This finding further supports the hypothesis that nonverbal communication has been considered lacking in online courses (Dixson et al., 2017; LimanKaban, 2021).

Lastly, Research Question 3 evaluated the effects of NVC on motivation, level of commitment and understanding of students in interactive online learning. As it is mentioned in the earlier studies, communication aims to develop motivation in the person to whom addressed (Bambaeroo&Shokrpour, 2017). In the classroom, communication gains more importance to reach the child understanding and to have an effective and interactive classroom. As mentioned in the data analysis, all of the participated students reported that teachers' eye contact and facial expressions is a source of motivation for them towards the lesson and this result match with the earlier studies statements that eye contact encourages students to contribute and participate.

### **Conclusion and Limitations**

The results have shown that there is a connection between secondary EFL teachers' NVC and the forming of student motivation and collaborative engagement. This study discovered that learning happens, but it improves with the presence and motivation supported by teachers' NVC. Eye contact is often viewed by students as a source of inspiration, focus, excitement and a means to gain the attention. Significant learning happens when the attention of students is obtained, based on qualitative researchers and as Cruickshank et al., (2003) stated cognitive processes starts with students paying attention to the cues. If students take part in the class, they are more likely to take actions that improve their comprehension of the subjects as well. The size of the study with poor participation number limits the generalizability of the results. Also, the time is the biggest limitation of this study. If there was more time, the authors of this study would conduct their research with more participants. Furthermore, lack of observation the teachers limit the accurate results for this study, yet more time needed to observe teachers in their online learning environment and assess their behaviors as regards of this study in a reliable and validity way. Since the pandemic has started in early 2020, researchers did not focus on nonverbal communication in online learning environment before. Accordingly, there is a limited number of previous research studies about nonverbal communication in an online learning environment. Moreover, the internet connection speed limited this study results since there was lack of talking time while doing interviews with students and learners due to the bad internet connection speed. Accordingly, participants of this study got bored or distracted for this reason.

Other researchers can do this study by observing teachers' online teaching classes. They may ask teachers to record their lessons in two different ways; first, they may ask students to turn on their cameras and they may do their lessons with the cameras on, secondly, the whole class may turn off their cameras and teachers may do the lessons like that. This study is promising research because Nonverbal Communication (NVC) in online learning is important as a face-to-face class. Although some studies found that, some students considered online learning as more attractive than face-to-face because there is a lack of Nonverbal Communication. They transformed the lack of Nonverbal Communication and found different ways to connect to their teachers and friends. Meanwhile, other students considered it hard to learn new things without Nonverbal Communication and its reinforcement.

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