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Unspoken Connections: Exploring English Teachers' Non-verbal Immediacy and Classroom Dynamics Through the Lens of Students

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Abstract: Non-verbal immediacy is a vital component of teacher-student interactions, particularly in English language classrooms, where it enhances communication and fosters student engagement. While non-verbal cues are commonly used by teachers in the Philippine context to aid comprehension, limited research exists on how students perceive these behaviors and their impact on classroom dynamics. This study explored students' perspectives on their English teachers' non-verbal immediacy and its potential effect on classroom interactions. Specifically, it examined the types of non-verbal behaviors students observe and how these behaviors affect their engagement, participation and the overall classroom dynamics. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design, collecting data through semi-structured interviews with nine Grade 10 students from Balibago Integrated High School, Sta. Rosa City, Laguna. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's framework. The findings identified eight superordinate themes and thirty-four subordinate themes, emphasizing the significant role of non-verbal behaviors—such as eye contact, hand gestures, facial expressions, and teacher movement—in enhancing student engagement and fostering a positive classroom environment. Eye contact and hand gestures particularly improve student focus and comprehension, while positive facial expressions, like smiling, reduce anxiety and create a supportive atmosphere. However, excessive eye contact and unclear gestures can lead to discomfort. Additionally, teacher tone, proximity, and posture play key roles in maintaining a participative classroom dynamic, with negative body language hindering engagement. The study concluded that non-verbal immediacy has a profound impact on classroom dynamics, highlighting its crucial role in enhancing student participation and creating an inclusive learning environment. The study recommended integrating non-verbal communication training into teacher development programs and encouraging educators to practice self-reflection, balance immediacy strategies, and adapt their behaviors based on student needs.

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1. Introduction

In language education, communication is not limited to spoken or written words. Teachers constantly send messages through gestures, posture, facial expressions, and physical proximity—forms of non-verbal behavior that students interpret as part of their overall learning experience. These behaviors, often subtle and automatic, contribute significantly to classroom climate, student motivation, and learner engagement. Collectively referred to as non-verbal immediacy, such cues are essential in establishing relational closeness and fostering supportive learning environments. In English language

classrooms, where communication challenges may stem from students' developing proficiency, non-verbal behaviors serve as critical tools for enhancing clarity and connection.

Research has shown that non-verbal immediacy can enhance student engagement, facilitate comprehension, and reduce affective barriers to learning. Smiles, nods, eye contact, and open gestures, for example, can signal warmth, encouragement, and attentiveness. These cues help establish a psychologically safe environment that supports risk-taking, particularly important when learners are acquiring a second or foreign language. Conversely, the absence of non-verbal immediacy—or the presence of negative signals like frowns or dismissive body language—can increase anxiety, reduce participation, and limit the effectiveness of instruction (Abekah Keelson et al., 2024).

While studies from Western contexts have emphasized the importance of non-verbal immediacy in promoting teacher-student rapport and student-centered pedagogy, there is limited research that explores this phenomenon in Southeast Asian settings, particularly from the perspective of students. In the multilingual and multicultural classrooms of the Philippines, the significance of non-verbal immediacy may be even more pronounced. English, though an official medium of instruction, is not the first language of many students (Tandyonomanu et al., 2023). Teachers often bridge comprehension gaps using gestures, expressions, and tone, especially when addressing diverse linguistic backgrounds and varying proficiency levels.

In response to this, the Department of Education (DepEd) has established several policies that emphasize the importance of communication in education. For instance, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), as outlined in DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, includes competencies related to effective communication. However, the focus of these standards remains largely on verbal communication and instructional clarity, with less attention paid to how teachers' non-verbal behaviors contribute to classroom dynamics and student outcomes. As such, professional development on non-verbal immediacy remains limited, despite its frequent and spontaneous use in daily teaching practice.

Moreover, existing studies often focus on teachers' perspectives or observable behaviors, neglecting how students interpret and respond to these non-verbal cues. Since students are the recipients of instructional communication, their perspectives are vital in understanding the effectiveness of non-verbal immediacy. How students perceive non-verbal cues can significantly influence their engagement, motivation, and overall classroom experience. For example, positive non-verbal behaviors, such as smiling or making eye contact, may make students feel more supported and encourage participation. On the other hand, negative cues, like lack of eye contact or closed body language, can contribute to feelings of anxiety or disengagement. Non-verbal cues help bridge comprehension gaps, particularly for students who may struggle with the verbal aspects of language learning, enhancing their overall learning experience (Stamatis & Kostoula, 2021).

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring students' perspectives on their English teachers' non-verbal immediacy behaviors and examining how these behaviors influence classroom participation, emotional engagement, and the overall learning atmosphere. Grounded in a qualitative approach, the study aims to generate context-rich insights that can inform teacher training, improve instructional practices, and contribute to the broader conversation on communication in language education. By centering the voices of learners, it offers a student-informed lens through which to understand how every day, often unspoken teacher behaviors shape the classroom experience.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore students' perspectives on their English teachers' non-verbal immediacy. By adopting this design, the research aimed to uncover the lived experiences of students and provide a deeper understanding of how non-verbal behaviors influence classroom dynamics. Interviews served as the primary method of data collection, allowing participants to articulate their thoughts and experiences in a detailed and meaningful manner.

The study was conducted at Balibago Integrated High School in Sta. Rosa City, Laguna, a school known for its diverse student population. The location was strategically chosen to facilitate easy access for classroom observations and follow-up interviews, ensuring the collection of comprehensive data. Additionally, the supportive administration and faculty contributed to a conducive research environment, making collaboration and coordination more seamless.

Participants in this study consisted of nine Grade 10 students between the ages of 15 and 17. These students were selected using purposeful sampling, ensuring that they met specific criteria relevant to the research. They were required to be enrolled at Balibago Integrated High School, ensuring recent interactions with English teachers. Their age group was deliberately chosen to capture the perspectives of students who possess the ability to reflect on and articulate their classroom experiences. Furthermore, participants demonstrated a willingness and capacity to engage in discussions about their teachers' non-verbal behaviors, assessed through an initial screening process. The study also made provisions for inclusivity by considering students with special educational needs while ensuring that all participants possessed sufficient English proficiency to effectively contribute to interviews.

To facilitate meaningful conversations, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide consisting of ten carefully crafted questions. These questions were designed based on previous studies examining non-verbal communication in educational settings (Burgoon et al., 2021). The guide focused on identifying common non-verbal immediacy behaviors exhibited by English teachers and assessing how students perceive their impact on classroom interactions. Through this approach, the study aimed to capture nuanced responses while allowing participants the flexibility to share their personal insights.

Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (Hole, 2021). Thematic analysis followed six phases, beginning with familiarization, where the researcher thoroughly engaged with the interview transcripts to identify key patterns. Initial codes were generated based on recurring themes related to non-verbal immediacy, followed by categorization into broader thematic groups. Themes were meticulously reviewed to ensure coherence, leading to a refined interpretation of students' perspectives. The final phase involved compiling the findings with direct quotes, providing authenticity and depth to the results.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. The study received formal approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Pamantasan ng Cabuyao and the Schools Division Superintendent of Santa Rosa City. Before data collection commenced, informed consent was obtained from all participants, including their guardians, ensuring voluntary participation. Detailed explanations of the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks were provided, allowing participants to make informed decisions. As the respondents were minors, parental consent was a mandatory prerequisite.

To uphold privacy and data security, the research adhered to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) by anonymizing all participant details and implementing stringent measures to protect sensitive information. Data was securely stored with limited access granted only to authorized personnel. Additionally, the interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable setting to minimize psychological or emotional discomfort for

participants. If any questions caused unease, students were given the freedom to skip them without pressure.

Finally, the study maintained transparency and integrity in reporting its findings, ensuring that data was presented accurately without manipulation. Any limitations encountered during the research process were acknowledged and discussed to provide a balanced interpretation of the results.

3. Results

Table 1. Summary of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes.

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Common Non-verbal Immediacy Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintaining Eye Contact ● Encouraging Hand Gestures ● Walking Around the Classroom ● Physical Proximity and Light Touch
Eye Contact in Bridging Participative Discussion among Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintain Focus and Understanding ● Encourage Participation ● Perceived Exclusive Attention ● Creates Discomfort and Distraction
Eye Contact as a Barrier in Student Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feelings of Pressure and Anxiety ● Apprehension from Sudden Recitation ● Silent Criticism Effect ● Facilitates Positive and Comforting Learning Atmosphere
Face as Mirror of Learning Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhance Student Engagement ● Sets Mood for Learning Environment ● Enhancing Comprehension ● Capturing Attention
Perceptions on the Role of Hand Gesture-Assisted Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Welcoming Engagement ● Distraction from Overused Movements ● Confusion from Unclear Gestures ● Clarity and Comprehension ● Attention and Engagement
Teacher's Manner of Speaking and its Effect on Student Engagement and Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop Emotional Connection ● Negative Tone as Disengagement and Discomfort ● Tone Adjustment for Improved Communication ● Anxious and Nervous ● Reaction Formation
Perceptions on Teacher Proximity and Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Distracted and Feelings of Physical Discomfort ● Sense of Connection ● Discussion is more audible ● Agitated due to perceived recitation ● Reflection of Professionalism, Authority, and Enthusiasm to Class
Teacher Posture and Classroom Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invites Engagement Participation ● Uplifts Student Motivation ● Strict and Observation-like manner

This research identifies eight clustered superordinate themes that encapsulate students' perspectives on their English teachers' non-verbal immediacy and its influence

on their participation, engagement, and overall classroom dynamics. These themes include the following: (1) Common Non-verbal Immediacy Behaviors; (2) Eye Contact in Bridging Participative Discussion among Learners; (3) Eye Contact as a Barrier in Student Engagement; (4) Face as Mirror of Learning Engagement; (5) Perceptions on the Role of Hand Gesture-Assisted Learning; (6) Teacher's Manner of Speaking and its Effect on Student Engagement and Comprehension; (7) Perceptions on Teacher Proximity and Movement; and (8) Teacher Posture and Classroom Perception.

4. Discussion

The data analysis revealed key findings that directly address the research problems, offering valuable insights into students' perspectives on their English teachers' non-verbal immediacy and its impact on their participation, engagement, and overall classroom dynamics.

Theme 1: Common Non-verbal Immediacy Behaviors

The study revealed four (4) non-verbal immediacy behaviors commonly observed by students from their English teachers, namely: eye contact, hand gestures, movement around the classroom, and proximity and light touch.

The participants noted that maintaining eye contact helps reduce psychological distance between teachers and students, signaling attentiveness and interest while encouraging participation and sustained focus. Research by Liu (2021) confirmed this, highlighting that eye contact is essential for effective classroom communication, as it establishes rapport and emphasizes the importance of the content being taught.

Similarly, encouraging hand gestures reinforces verbal communication particularly when emphasizing key points and clarifying complex ideas, thereby enhancing comprehension and retention. Mehrabian's theory supported this idea as gestures provide visual cues that strengthen understanding, and Liu (2021) further highlighted that hand gestures capture attention and promote better retention of material.

Meanwhile, the participants perceived their English teachers' walking around the classroom as something that fosters inclusivity and interaction, making teachers more approachable and encouraging students to participate actively and ask questions with greater comfort. According to research by Liu (2021), teachers who move around the classroom create a sense of approachability, reducing psychological distance and promoting a more interactive learning environment.

Lastly, the participants observed physical proximity and light touch among their English teachers which they mentioned to have reinforced emotional connection, engagement, and reassurance, though cultural sensitivities must be considered to ensure these cues are appropriate. Hall and Knapp (2021) emphasized that physical proximity enhances emotional connection, while Wang (2023) indicates that teachers' closeness to students encourages participation and provides reassurance.

Theme 2: Eye Contact in Bridging Participative Discussion among Learners

The second theme highlights eye contact as a crucial non-verbal immediacy behavior that significantly impacts student focus, participation, and perceived attention in the classroom.

The participants' responses suggested that maintaining eye contact helps students stay engaged and clarify their understanding of the material. According to Liu (2021), eye contact reduces psychological distance, making teacher-student interactions more direct and personal. Additionally, Wang (2023) found that eye contact reinforces students' presence and contributions, enhancing their ability to concentrate and retain information effectively.

Aside from focus, eye contact plays a key role in encouraging student participation by signaling attentiveness and engagement from the teacher. Some students feel more comfortable speaking up when teachers maintain eye contact, a behavior that aligns with Andersen's theory as cited by Liu (2021), which states that non-verbal immediacy

behaviors foster trust and openness. Research by Haataja et al. (2021) further supported this, indicating that eye contact, particularly when combined with teacher warmth, enhances student engagement and classroom participation.

Moreover, eye contact fosters a sense of exclusive attention, helping students feel acknowledged and valued in the learning environment. Hall and Knapp (2021) highlight that eye contact creates immediacy, signaling that teachers are present and actively engaged with students. Liu (2021) affirmed that this perceived exclusive attention strengthens students' connection to the classroom and makes them more likely to contribute to discussions. These findings emphasize the importance of purposeful eye contact in fostering a positive and participatory learning environment.

Theme 3: Eye Contact as a Barrier in Student Engagement

The third theme indicates that while eye contact is generally perceived as a positive non-verbal communication tool in classrooms, some students experience discomfort and distraction when exposed to direct or prolonged eye contact from teachers. For these students, eye contact, instead of fostering engagement, becomes an unwelcome focal point that diverts attention from lesson content. Khan (2023) highlighted that non-verbal cues, including eye contact, play a powerful role in shaping students' motivation and focus. However, this finding suggests that if eye contact is perceived as overwhelming, it can create unintended barriers to learning rather than promoting connection.

Aside from discomfort, some students associated eye contact with feelings of pressure and anxiety, especially when they interpret it as an indicator of assessment or evaluation. Cooper and Brownell (2020) found that active learning strategies, such as cold calling, can amplify students' stress due to their fear of negative evaluation. This suggests that eye contact may unintentionally hinder engagement and performance, often leading to emotional disaffection such as boredom and reduced involvement in learning activities.

Additionally, some participants mentioned that eye contact in active learning settings, especially when linked to sudden calls for participation, frequently causes apprehension. Chen (2023) noted that anxiety in such situations can lead students to avoid eye contact intentionally in an effort to reduce their chances of being singled out. This suggests that in some cases, eye contact during recitation may discourage participation, making students less likely to engage in learning activities.

Finally, some students interpreted certain types of eye contact, particularly after an incorrect response or lack of participation, as silent criticism or disapproval. This gaze, even without words, may lead to feelings of judgment and undervaluation, negatively affecting self-esteem and discouraging future engagement. Khan (2023) emphasized the significant impact of teachers' non-verbal behaviors on students' emotional states and overall learning experiences. These findings underscore the complexity of eye contact as a non-verbal cue, demonstrating that while it can encourage engagement, it must be used with sensitivity to avoid unintended negative effects.

Theme 4: Face as Mirror of Learning Engagement

The fourth theme highlights teachers' facial expressions, particularly smiling, as a vital part in fostering a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere. For many participants, a genuine smile can help alleviate their anxiety, create a sense of belonging, and contribute to a comfortable emotional climate that encourages learning. Abou Assali (2024) found that students perceive their teacher's smile as a significant factor in reducing stress and increasing comfort, ultimately improving their learning experience. This suggests that positive emotional expressions align with positive psychology principles, which emphasize that cultivating a supportive environment leads to better student attitudes and academic performance.

Beyond fostering a welcoming atmosphere, enthusiastic facial expressions were also seen to enhance student engagement and motivation. Students noted that when teachers display approachable and expressive facial cues, students feel encouraged to participate actively. Liu (2021) conducted a systematic review demonstrating that teacher immediacy

behaviors, including facial expressions, are linked to higher student motivation and attentiveness. This finding suggests that these non-verbal cues not only support greater engagement but also inspire students to focus more on their learning, leading to improved academic outcomes.

Additionally, teachers' emotional expressions significantly influence the overall mood and tone of the classroom. Positive facial expressions help create a cheerful and inviting learning environment, making lessons more enjoyable and encouraging active participation. Conversely, negative expressions may contribute to a tense or unwelcoming atmosphere, which can discourage student involvement. Pi et al. (2024) found that instructors who use positive facial expressions in video lectures enhance student learning and engagement by conveying enthusiasm and reducing psychological distance. These findings underscore the importance of teachers' emotional expressions in shaping the learning environment, demonstrating their potential to either foster or hinder student engagement.

Theme 5: Perceptions on the Role of Hand Gesture-Assisted Learning

The fifth theme underscores hand gestures as pivotal in enhancing student comprehension, particularly when explaining complex concepts. The participants emphasized that gestures help make abstract ideas more tangible and easier to understand by providing visual cues that complement verbal explanations. García-Gómez et al. (2024) investigated how observing or performing gestures influences foreign language vocabulary learning, finding that both observing and performing congruent gestures improved vocabulary recall, with active performance yielding stronger results. These findings suggested that gestures support deeper understanding and memory retention, reinforcing the principles of embodied cognition theory.

Hand gestures also serve as effective tools for capturing and maintaining students' attention. The participants noted that dynamic and purposeful gestures help direct their focus to key points in the lesson, reinforcing instructional clarity. Lopez-Ozieblo (2023) demonstrated that instructors' gestures significantly enhance students' attentional engagement, leading to improved learning outcomes. This aligned with cognitive load theory, which suggests that well-designed instructional gestures optimize cognitive resource allocation, making information processing and retention more efficient.

Additionally, incorporating hand gestures into teaching fosters a more interactive and welcoming classroom atmosphere, encouraging greater student participation. The participants highlighted that gestures convey enthusiasm and openness, making teachers appear more approachable and inviting. Wang et al. (2024) highlighted that non-verbal immediacy behaviors, including gestures, contribute to a positive learning environment where students feel comfortable engaging in discussions and activities. This suggests that teachers' gestures significantly influence student motivation and engagement levels.

However, some participants noted that excessive or repetitive use of gestures may lead to distraction, ultimately diminishing their effectiveness. They mentioned that overused movements can divert their attention from the content and cause disorientation. Zhang et al. (2024) found that frequent pointing gestures and excessive facial expressions in video lectures hindered learning, emphasizing the need for moderation in non-verbal cues. This finding highlights the importance of balancing gesture use to ensure that it reinforces, rather than detracts from, instructional clarity.

Lastly, unclear or incongruent hand gestures can lead to confusion, hindering the learning process. The participants shared that when gestures do not align with verbal messages, they create confusion and leave them uncertain about their intended meaning. García-Gómez et al. (2024) found that meaningless or mismatched gestures negatively impacted foreign language vocabulary learning, emphasizing the importance of clarity and consistency in gestural communication. This supports dual coding theory, which underscores the integration of verbal and non-verbal information to facilitate effective

learning. These findings highlight the need for intentional and strategic use of gestures in the classroom.

Theme 6: Teacher's Manner of Speaking and its Effect on Student Engagement and Comprehension

The sixth theme emphasizes the importance of clear and precise communication in effective teaching, as it directly influences students' comprehension and academic performance. The participants mentioned that explicit instruction, characterized by structured and unambiguous delivery, enhances their understanding by reducing cognitive load and allowing them to process information more efficiently. Sohrabi et al. (2023) supported this by highlighting how well-managed working memory resources optimize learning, aligning with cognitive load theory, which emphasizes instructional clarity as a key factor in student success.

Additionally, the way teachers speak plays a critical role in capturing students' attention and maintaining engagement. The participants noted that vocal enthusiasm, marked by dynamic changes in pitch and tone, has been shown to sustain their focus and interest throughout lessons. Marty-Dugas et al. (2024) found that students exposed to lectures delivered with higher vocal enthusiasm reported significantly greater engagement compared to those in lower-energy environments, reinforcing the importance of varied vocal delivery in educational settings.

Moreover, the tone of voice used by teachers plays a crucial role in developing emotional connections with students. The participants shared that warm and inviting tones foster trust and relatedness, creating a supportive classroom atmosphere. Paulmann et al. (2023) suggested that motivational prosody influences students' emotional responses, with supportive tones enhancing their sense of connectedness and well-being. Conversely, negative or harsh tones can lead to disengagement and discomfort, as controlling speech styles may unintentionally create a threatening environment, reducing students' motivation and participation. Paulmann et al. (2023) further found that negative tones are often perceived as less trustworthy, which aligns with the concept of psychological safety—an essential factor in fostering a secure and productive learning environment.

Finally, the ability to adjust tone in response to context and content is vital for effective communication. The participants revealed that teachers who skillfully modulate their vocal delivery can better convey enthusiasm, highlight key points, and address students' emotional needs. Dhillon and Kaur (2021) found that expressiveness and precision in communication styles are positively correlated with teaching effectiveness, suggesting that intentional tone adjustments improve both message clarity and overall instructional impact. By fostering a more engaging and responsive classroom environment, tone modulation enhances learning outcomes and student participation.

Theme 7: Perceptions on Teacher Proximity and Movement

The seventh theme highlights the role of teachers' physical proximity in the classroom in evoking a range of emotional and cognitive responses from students. While some participants perceived close teacher presence as supportive, others experienced heightened anxiety, particularly when proximity is unexpected. Liu (2021) found that teacher immediacy can increase motivation for some students but may also heighten anxiety for those with higher communication apprehension. This suggests that physical closeness is interpreted differently based on individual preferences and contextual cues.

In response to this anxiety, some students overcompensate by displaying forced confidence or speaking up more frequently—an example of reaction formation, a defense mechanism described in Freud's Psychodynamic Theory. Marpaung and Wijaya (2022) further explored this phenomenon, finding that students sometimes engage in "protective participation" behaviors under perceived social pressure, including teacher surveillance. This suggests that fostering psychologically supportive strategies can encourage genuine engagement rather than compliance-driven performance.

On the other hand, the participants mentioned that excessive teacher movement or overly close proximity can be disruptive, causing physical unease and difficulty focusing. Tandyonomanu et al. (2023) noted that high levels of non-verbal immediacy can overwhelm students, leading to distraction rather than engagement. Hall's Proxemics Theory, reinforced this by demonstrating how uninvited closeness can violate personal space norms, particularly in formal learning environments. These findings imply that excessive movement may cause cognitive overload, disrupting student concentration and comfort.

Meanwhile, some students associated teacher proximity with emotional connection and attentiveness. When approached calmly and intentionally, they reported feeling "seen" and "valued." Liu (2021) identified positive non-verbal immediacy as a significant predictor of student motivation and perceived teacher support. Social Presence Theory, further suggested that physical closeness enhances perceived warmth and relational connection between teachers and students. This indicates that intentional proximity can reinforce emotional connection, boosting student motivation and engagement.

Some participants also shared that teacher movement enhances classroom communication by making discussions more audible, particularly for students seated at the back. Dhillon and Kaur (2021) highlighted strategic positioning as a key factor in ensuring instruction clarity, especially in larger or acoustically challenging classrooms. This suggests that teachers who adjust their movement to improve auditory comprehension contribute to a more effective learning environment.

Lastly, some students interpreted close teacher proximity as a cue for recitation, triggering heightened stress or panic, especially when they feel unprepared. Paulmann et al. (2023) found that students respond to proximity, tone, and body language as performance demands. This reaction aligns with Arousal Theory of Motivation, which suggests that environmental cues can either provide positive stimulation or induce anxiety, depending on student readiness and perceived pressure. These findings underscore the dual impact of teacher proximity, highlighting its potential to both motivate and overwhelm students.

Theme 8: Teacher Posture and Classroom Perception

The eighth theme illustrates the role of teacher's posture in shaping students' perceptions of professionalism, authority, and enthusiasm in the classroom. The participants shared that an upright and open stance signals confidence and conveys passion for the subject, fostering a more positive learning environment. Liu (2021) highlighted that non-verbal immediacy enhances students' perception of instructor credibility, reinforcing engagement and enthusiasm. Furthermore, Valentin et al. (2022) found that teacher enthusiasm is linked to heightened student motivation, suggesting that an open and confident posture encourages active learning and greater interest in the subject matter.

Aside from professionalism, students noted that adopting an open and approachable posture invites their participation by reducing psychological distance between teachers and them. Non-verbal cues such as maintaining an open stance and making eye contact create a more interactive and engaging classroom atmosphere, reinforcing the principles of non-verbal immediacy (Liu, 2021). This highlights the importance of physical behaviors in fostering warmth and accessibility, encouraging students to take an active role in discussions.

Additionally, students also perceived their teachers' physical demeanor as influential in their motivation, with expressive gestures and upright posture inspiring engagement. Zhang et al. (2023) found that perceived teacher enthusiasm positively correlates with students' professional commitment and willingness to learn, reinforcing the importance of non-verbal communication in driving student motivation.

However, a rigid and closed posture can be perceived as overly strict or authoritative, making students feel observed and potentially hindering open

communication. While maintaining authority is essential for classroom management, excessive rigidity can create discomfort. Striking a balance between authority and approachability is crucial for fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages participation and engagement. These findings underscore the impact of teachers' posture on student motivation, participation, and overall classroom dynamics.

5. Conclusion

This study underscores the significant impact of English teachers' non-verbal immediacy behaviors in enhancing student engagement and creating a positive classroom environment. The following conclusions are derived from the findings.

- a. The findings underscore the significant role of non-verbal immediacy behaviors in shaping teacher-student interactions and fostering an engaging classroom environment. Eye contact, hand gestures, movement, and physical proximity serve as powerful tools that enhance communication, promote inclusivity, and strengthen emotional connections. While these behaviors encourage focus, comprehension, and participation, their effectiveness depends on thoughtful application and sensitivity to cultural considerations.
- b. Eye contact is a crucial non-verbal immediacy behavior that enhances student engagement, participation, and comprehension. It reduces psychological distance, fosters trust and openness, and signals attentiveness, making students feel acknowledged and valued. Purposeful eye contact strengthens focus and encourages active discussion, particularly when paired with teacher warmth. However, excessive or forced eye contact may cause discomfort.
- c. While eye contact is often seen as a positive non-verbal immediacy behavior, it can also act as a barrier to student engagement when not used thoughtfully. For some students, prolonged or direct eye contact creates discomfort, pressure, and anxiety, leading to reduced participation and avoidance behaviors. Additionally, certain types of eye contact, particularly after an incorrect response, may be perceived as silent criticism, negatively impacting students' self-esteem and willingness to engage.
- d. Teachers' facial expressions, especially smiling, foster a positive classroom environment by reducing anxiety, encouraging engagement, and enhancing learning. Enthusiastic expressions boost motivation and participation, while negative ones can create tension and discourage involvement. Intentional use of facial cues helps cultivate a welcoming and supportive learning space.
- e. Hand gestures enhance student comprehension by making abstract concepts more tangible, reinforcing verbal explanations, and maintaining attention. They improve instructional clarity and create an engaging classroom atmosphere, but excessive or unclear gestures can be distracting. When used strategically, gestures support learning, boost retention, and encourage active participation, making them a valuable teaching tool.
- f. A teacher's speaking style directly influences student engagement and comprehension. Clear communication reduces cognitive load, while vocal enthusiasm sustains attention and motivation. A warm tone fosters emotional connections and a supportive environment, whereas harsh tones can cause disengagement. Adjusting vocal delivery based on context enhances clarity and participation, making tone modulation essential for effective teaching.
- g. Teacher proximity and movement influence student engagement in both positive and challenging ways. Intentional proximity fosters emotional connection and motivation, while unexpected or excessive closeness may cause anxiety and disengagement. Strategic movement improves instructional clarity, but excessive movement can be distracting. Proximity also signals participation cues, which can sometimes trigger stress or pressure.
- h. A teacher's posture shapes students' perceptions of professionalism, authority, and enthusiasm. An open stance fosters confidence, engagement, and participation, while rigidity may create psychological distance. Approachable body language, including gestures and eye contact, enhances warmth and accessibility, motivating students. Balancing authority and approachability supports a positive and engaging classroom environment.

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