



Analyzing Non-Verbal Communication in Instructors' Classroom Demonstration

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Abstract: Non-verbal communication (NVC) is a fundamental yet often under-analyzed dimension of instructional delivery in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This study examines how instructors employ non-verbal communication—specifically gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and spatial dynamics—during classroom demonstrations, and how these cues shape student comprehension and engagement. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, data were gathered through non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers at a vocational high school in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Thematic analysis revealed four primary dimensions: (1) a dual-operating mechanism of instinctual and intentional NVC usage; (2) NVC acting as a multimodal pedagogical scaffold for abstract concepts; (3) dynamic teacher adjustments based on real-time student feedback; and (4) proxemics and posture serving as indicators of authority and approachability. The findings demonstrate that NVC is not merely an ancillary teaching aid, but a core pedagogical strategy that bridges linguistic gaps and enhances interactive learning. This research highlights the necessity of incorporating deliberate NVC training into language teacher education programs.

Keywords: Classroom demonstration, EFL pedagogy, instructor behavior, multimodal scaffolding, non-verbal communication, student engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication in educational settings is an intrinsically complex, dynamic, and multimodal phenomenon that extends far beyond the mere transmission of verbal language. While verbal instruction has historically received primary emphasis in pedagogical discourse, non-verbal communication (NVC)—comprising bodily movements, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and spatial relationships—serves as an indispensable foundation for effective classroom interaction. In instructional environments, non-verbal signals do not merely accompany spoken words; rather, they continuously modulate, reinforce, clarify, and frame the pedagogical messages being delivered. Consequently, understanding how instructors utilize non-verbal modalities is essential for optimizing teaching effectiveness and enriching student learning experiences.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, the reliance on non-verbal communication becomes even more pronounced. Language learners,

particularly those at basic or intermediate proficiency levels, frequently experience cognitive overload when processing unfamiliar linguistic structures, complex vocabulary, and rapid speech rates. Under these conditions, non-verbal cues act as crucial cognitive anchors that alleviate linguistic barriers and facilitate immediate comprehension. As Ghafar and Mahmood (2023) observe, non-verbal signals in language teaching provide essential contextual clues that allow students to infer meaning without depending exclusively on target language decoding. Thus, NVC operates as an active bridge between abstract target language input and student understanding.

Beyond its cognitive function, non-verbal communication plays a decisive role in shaping the socio-emotional climate of the classroom. Teaching and learning are deeply affective processes in which student motivation, willingness to communicate, and anxiety levels dictate learning outcomes. Instructors who display positive non-verbal behaviors, such as frequent smiling, welcoming postures, and open gestures, establish an emotionally supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and active participation. Conversely, distant or rigid non-verbal demeanors can heighten foreign language anxiety, causing students to withdraw from classroom interactions. Therefore, non-verbal behavior serves as both an instructional tool and an affective regulator.

Classroom demonstrations represent a high-density communicative event where verbal and non-verbal channels must be seamlessly synchronized. During instructional demonstrations, teachers not only explain concepts theoretically but also model procedures, illustrate abstract grammar rules, or demonstrate communicative tasks in real time. In such performance-oriented activities, bodily gestures, facial movements, and spatial positioning become primary conduits of instructional clarity. Effective classroom demonstrations rely heavily on the instructor's ability to orchestrate non-verbal cues strategically to guide student attention, highlight key pedagogical points, and maintain interactive flow.

Despite the widely acknowledged benefits of non-verbal communication, its systematic implementation in language classrooms faces substantial systemic and individual challenges. As Baugh et al. (2020) point out, teacher education programs often provide inadequate training regarding the deliberate use of non-verbal cues, leaving educators to rely mostly on intuitive, unexamined habits. Furthermore, insufficient classroom facilities, large class sizes, and rigid physical layouts frequently constrain instructors' spatial mobility and physical expressiveness. These structural limitations hinder teachers from fully realizing the pedagogical potential of non-verbal communication in second language instruction.

The complexity of non-verbal communication is further amplified by cultural variations in cue interpretation. Non-verbal behavior is deeply rooted in socio-cultural norms; a gesture or gaze pattern that signifies encouragement in one culture may be perceived as intimidating or disrespectful in another. In EFL contexts where cultural background shapes both teacher behavior and student perception, cross-cultural misinterpretations of non-verbal signals can easily occur. When teachers and students operate from different cultural frameworks, an instructor's intended non-verbal message may be misconstrued, leading to communication disconnects and reduced classroom engagement.

A critical issue in classroom interaction is that many language instructors remain insufficiently conscious of their own non-verbal communicative behavior. Educators frequently deploy gestures, facial expressions, and posture changes spontaneously or reflexively rather than as deliberate pedagogical strategies. While intuitive non-verbal behavior can be effective, the lack of meta-awareness regarding NVC often results in inconsistent instructional outcomes. When instructors fail to align their non-verbal cues intentionally with their verbal explanations, confusing or contradictory signals can be transmitted to students, ultimately hindering learning.

Recent empirical investigations highlight how instructor experience influences non-verbal patterns, particularly visual attention and gaze behavior. Keskin-Senkal et al.

(2024) assert that variations in instructors' professional experience manifest directly in their gaze patterns, which in turn significantly influence student attention, eye-tracking dynamics, and classroom involvement. Experienced teachers tend to deploy structured gaze distribution to monitor understanding and sustain engagement, whereas novice teachers may display erratic or unfocused visual behavior. This underscores that gaze control is not merely a passive physiological act but a learned pedagogical skill.

Research conducted within the Indonesian EFL landscape corroborates the profound impact of instructor non-verbal communication on student psychological readiness. For instance, Muhayyang et al. (2023) demonstrated that university lecturers' strategic eye contact significantly enhanced students' internal motivation and eagerness to participate in English learning tasks. Direct visual engagement from the instructor signals attentiveness and valuation, empowering students to overcome inhibitions in speaking the target language.

In a complementary Indonesian study, Istiqamah et al. (2023) highlighted the pedagogical role of instructor facial expressions, demonstrating that positive facial affect, such as frequent smiling and approachable expressions, directly stimulated student enthusiasm and sustained active involvement. These local findings affirm that non-verbal signals are vital in mitigating foreign language anxiety among Indonesian learners, who often experience apprehension when communicating in English. Consequently, instructor non-verbal immediacy acts as an essential catalyst for affective engagement.

In broader Indonesian ELT research, scholars have consistently emphasized that meaningful language learning relies on creating interactive, highly communicative, and culturally responsive learning environments (Muluk et al., 2020; Muluk et al., 2021). As Muluk et al. (2020) contend, effective English instruction in Indonesian vocational and secondary schools requires teachers to adopt multifaceted pedagogical practices that scaffold student comprehension amidst diverse learner backgrounds. Non-verbal behavior represents a core dimension of these flexible pedagogical practices, enabling instructors to create communicative spaces where meaning is co-constructed fluidly even when students' verbal proficiency is limited (Muluk et al., 2021).

The utility of non-verbal communication extends into the realm of abstract linguistic instruction, such as grammar explanation. Lopez-Ozieblo (2024) revealed that instructional gestures facilitate learners' conceptualization of complex grammatical structures, thereby mitigating cognitive confusion in the second language classroom. By embodying temporal or structural language properties through hand movements, instructors provide physical instantiations of abstract linguistic concepts, enabling students to grasp grammatical relationships more intuitively.

Contemporary scholarship further demonstrates that non-verbal cues directly contribute to communicative precision and instructional efficiency. Hu and Wang (2023) indicated that when EFL teachers actively integrated gestures and sustained eye contact into their teaching repertoire, student engagement increased significantly while the incidence of instruction misinterpretation decreased. Clear non-verbal cues serve as instructional qualifiers, confirming whether a statement is a command, a question, an encouragement, or a correction.

The integration of non-verbal channels aligns closely with modern theories of multimodal pedagogy, which posit that learning is optimized when information is presented through multiple sensory modalities. As highlighted by Sharkiya et al. (2023) in cross-disciplinary communication studies, combining non-verbal cues such as smiling, nodding, and strategic positioning fosters clearer, highly productive interactions and reinforces overall message retention. In the EFL classroom, multimodal presentation transforms static verbal input into a dynamic, multisensory educational experience.

Despite these documented insights, a significant gap remains in the existing literature regarding instructor non-verbal communication. The majority of prior empirical studies have investigated non-verbal components in isolation—focusing exclusively on visual gaze (e.g., Keskin-Senkal et al., 2024), isolated gestures (e.g., Lopez-Ozieblo, 2024),

or teacher facial affect (e.g., Istiqamah et al., 2023). Few studies have examined non-verbal communication as a cohesive, integrated multimodal system operating holistically during real-time classroom demonstrations.

Furthermore, much of the existing research on EFL non-verbal communication in Indonesia has been situated within general secondary school or higher education environments, largely neglecting vocational high school contexts (SMK). Vocational students often require specialized pedagogical approaches centered on practical, visual, and task-based demonstrations. Examining how vocational EFL instructors synthesize gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and spatial dynamics during instructional demonstrations remains significantly under-researched.

To address these empirical gaps, this research adopts a holistic perspective that views instructor non-verbal behavior as an interconnected communicative matrix. Rather than treating gestures or eye contact as isolated variables, this study investigates how various non-verbal modalities synergize during instructional demonstrations to create multimodal scaffolding. By capturing the dynamic interplay between intentional strategies and instinctual behaviors, this research provides a nuanced understanding of non-verbal pedagogy in action.

Situated at SMKN 3 Banda Aceh, an Indonesian vocational high school, this study explores teacher-student non-verbal interactions within a authentic, real-world educational environment. This setting offers a rich empirical foundation for observing how instructors use body language, spatial movement, and facial expressions to deliver complex English lessons to vocational students who possess varying levels of language motivation and proficiency.

Specifically, this study aims to examine the holistic utilization of non-verbal communication by English instructors during classroom demonstrations and analyze its pedagogical impact on student comprehension and active engagement. It explores both the deliberate pedagogical choices and the spontaneous non-verbal behaviors displayed by instructors, as well as how students interpret and respond to these non-verbal signals during classroom interactions.

The theoretical and practical significance of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it contributes to the expanding discourse on multimodal language pedagogy by offering an integrated framework of non-verbal instructor behavior in vocational EFL settings. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for language teacher education and professional development programs, emphasizing the need to cultivate strategic non-verbal awareness to enhance instructional delivery, optimize classroom management, and foster engaging learning environments.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to provide an in-depth, contextualized analysis of instructors' non-verbal communication (NVC) during classroom demonstrations. A qualitative framework was particularly appropriate for this investigation as it enabled the researcher to explore the subtle, multifaceted, and real-time nuances of non-verbal interactions within their natural educational setting. Rather than quantifying non-verbal behaviors or testing predetermined hypotheses, the qualitative descriptive approach allowed for a rich, naturalistic depiction of how non-verbal cues—such as gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and spatial dynamics—are dynamically integrated into instructional practices. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) emphasize, qualitative inquiry is uniquely suited for examining the complex processes and social meanings embedded within contextualized human interactions.

Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at SMKN 3 Banda Aceh, a public vocational high school located in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Vocational school environments provide a unique pedagogical context for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, as teaching frequently involves practical demonstrations, task-based learning, and visual explanations.

The participants were selected using purposeful sampling to ensure the inclusion of English instructors who regularly incorporate classroom demonstrations into their teaching routines. Two English teachers (referred to as Teacher I and Teacher II) participated in the study. Both instructors possessed extensive experience in vocational EFL education and taught classes comprising students with diverse English language proficiency levels. To gain a holistic understanding of classroom interactions, students participating in the observed sessions were also included as secondary informants through classroom interaction monitoring and casual post-observation feedback.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through two primary qualitative methods: non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Triangulating these data sources ensured a comprehensive understanding of both observed behaviors and the instructors' underlying pedagogical intentions.

1. **Classroom Observations:** Direct, non-participant observations were conducted across several active EFL sessions at SMKN 3 Banda Aceh. The researcher acted as a silent observer, positioning themselves unobtrusively in the classroom to minimize the Hawthorne effect and capture authentic classroom dynamics. Observation protocols focused on capturing four specific modalities of non-verbal communication during instructional demonstrations: (a) hand and arm gestures, (b) facial expressions, (c) eye contact and gaze direction, and (d) bodily posture and proxemic/spatial movement. Detailed field notes were maintained to record the frequency, contextual triggers, and immediate student reactions associated with specific non-verbal cues. In accordance with Cohen et al. (2011), observing communicative behaviors within their natural setting mitigates observer bias and yields a authentic representation of typical classroom interaction.
2. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Following the observational phase, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participating English instructors. The interview protocol was designed to probe teachers' pedagogical awareness, exploring whether their non-verbal behaviors were deliberate strategies or instinctive reactions. Sample interview questions focused on how instructors intentionally adjust their non-verbal cues when explaining complex grammatical concepts, how they interpret student non-verbal feedback, and their perceptions regarding the impact of proxemics on classroom management. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and was subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis Framework

The collected observational field notes and interview transcripts were analyzed using the reflexive thematic analysis framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This framework was selected due to its systematic yet flexible approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns of meaning within qualitative datasets. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six sequential phases:

1. *Familiarization with the data:* Repeated reading of interview transcripts and observational field notes to gain an immersive understanding of the textual data.
2. *Generating initial codes:* Methodical line-by-line coding of raw data segments that highlighted specific instances of non-verbal cues, instructional purposes, or student responses.

3. *Searching for themes*: Collapsing and organizing codes into broader candidate themes that captured significant pedagogical patterns.
4. *Reviewing themes*: Verifying candidate themes against the entire dataset to ensure consistency and empirical coherence.
5. *Defining and naming themes*: Refining theme boundaries and developing descriptive labels for the four final emerging themes.
6. *Producing the report*: Integrating narrative extracts, interview quotes, and observational evidence into a coherent analytic narrative.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness, the study implemented several qualitative validation strategies. *Credibility* was established through methodological triangulation (combining observational field notes with teacher interviews) and member checking, wherein interview transcripts and thematic interpretations were returned to the participating instructors to confirm interpretive accuracy. *Dependability* was maintained by maintaining a clear audit trail documenting data collection procedures, raw notes, and coding decisions.

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the research process. Formal permission was obtained from the administration of SMKN 3 Banda Aceh prior to data collection. Written informed consent was secured from all participating teachers. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by replacing participants' real names with pseudonyms (e.g., Teacher I, Teacher II) and storing all digital data in password-protected repositories.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis of classroom observation field notes and semi-structured teacher interviews, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, yielded four primary themes regarding instructors' non-verbal communication (NVC) during classroom demonstrations at SMKN 3 Banda Aceh. These themes capture the complex, multimodal nature of non-verbal cues and their direct impact on vocational EFL students' comprehension, motivation, and classroom dynamics.

To provide a structured overview of the empirical findings, **Table 1** synthesizes the core themes, sub-themes, representative observational/interview evidence, and their corresponding pedagogical functions.

Table 1. Summary of Emerging Themes, Empirical Evidence, and Pedagogical Functions

Theme	Sub-Theme / Dimension	Representative Empirical Evidence (Observation & Interview)	Primary Pedagogical Function
Dual-Operating NVC: Instinctual vs. Deliberate	Instinctual bodily motion	<i>"I often do not recognize that I am using my hands, yet students typically comprehend more effectively when I demonstrate my meaning."</i> (Teacher I)	Renders abstract temporal/linguistic concepts concrete and manages turn-taking.
	Strategic cue deployment	<i>Field Note:</i> Backward/forward hand motions during tenses explanation.	

Theme	Sub-Theme / Dimension	Representative Empirical Evidence (Observation & Interview)	Primary Pedagogical Function
NVC as Multimodal Pedagogical Scaffolding	Gestural embodiment	<i>"At times, when I provide explanations solely through verbal means, they appear perplexed. However, when I utilize gestures or facial expressions, they comprehend more rapidly."</i> (Teacher I)	Reduces cognitive friction, clarifies complex grammar, and builds confidence.
	Affective reinforcement		
Adaptive NVC Driven by Real-Time Student Feedback	Responsive proximity	<i>"Their reactions indicate my subsequent actions; if they appear perplexed, I incorporate gestures; if they seem fatigued, I approach them or alter my expression."</i> (Teacher II)	Regulates instructional pace, restores attentiveness, and maintains engagement.
	Evaluative gaze adjustment		
Spatial Dynamics and Posture as Dual Markers	Supervisory proxemics	<i>"When the teacher circulates, I perceive her as both evaluating us and prepared to assist."</i> (Student Feedback Excerpt) <i>Field Note: Erect posture at the front vs. relaxed posture near groups.</i>	Negotiates classroom authority, reduces psychological distance, and sustains discipline.
	Authoritative vs. approachable posture		

Dual-Operating Mechanism: Unplanned Instinct and Intentional Strategy

The observational and interview data revealed that non-verbal communication operated on two distinct yet complementary levels during classroom demonstrations: spontaneous (instinctual) and deliberate (intentional). Instructors frequently deployed bodily movements subconsciously as an intrinsic part of expressive speech, while simultaneously orchestrating specific gestures to achieve targeted instructional goals.

During grammatical explanations, instructors exhibited subconscious motor movements that embodied abstract linguistic features. For example, during a session on English tenses, Teacher I instinctively moved her hands backward over her shoulder to represent the past tense and pushed her palms forward to signal the future tense. This physical instantiation converted abstract temporal concepts into visible spatial relations. In contrast, deliberate gestures—such as thumbs-up signs for positive reinforcement, pointing to allocate turns, or rhythmic hand taps to emphasize key vocabulary—were employed intentionally to guide classroom workflow. Reflecting on this dual mechanism, Teacher I stated:

"I often do not recognize that I am using my hands, yet students typically comprehend more effectively when I demonstrate my meaning."

Facial expressions and eye contact similarly exhibited this duality. Spontaneous smiles occurred naturally during lighthearted interactions, creating a warm affective atmosphere, whereas stern expressions were deliberately deployed to signal behavioral boundaries. Furthermore, visual gaze was methodically utilized to capture attention and prompt participation. Teacher II explained her strategic use of gaze during questioning:

"When I make direct eye contact with them, they exhibit increased attentiveness. It functions as a discreet prompt to maintain concentration."

Non-Verbal Communication as Multimodal Pedagogical Scaffolding

The second theme demonstrates that NVC served as an essential multimodal scaffold that supported student understanding, particularly when verbal explanations proved insufficient for vocational EFL learners. Gestures, expressions, and physical movements provided concrete visual anchors that complemented verbal input, effectively bridging comprehension gaps.

Classroom observations revealed frequent instances where students mirrored the instructor's gestures while internalizing new language structures. During an explanation of the *present continuous tense*, Teacher I executed continuous circular hand motions to illustrate ongoing action. Subsequently, during collaborative group tasks, students were observed repeating the same circular hand gestures when explaining grammatical rules to their peers. This behavior demonstrates how instructional gestures transition from externally provided scaffolding to internalized cognitive tools. Teacher I underscored this dynamic in her interview:

"At times, when I provide explanations solely through verbal means, they appear perplexed. However, when I utilize gestures or facial expressions, they comprehend more rapidly."

In addition to cognitive clarification, facial affect acted as affective scaffolding. Affirmative nodding and encouraging smiles reduced foreign language anxiety among hesitant students, encouraging them to speak. Direct eye contact validated student contributions, signaling that their answers were valued. By combining bodily gestures with positive facial affect, instructors transformed traditional, text-heavy explanations into dynamic, multimodal learning experiences that enhanced retention and reduced cognitive overload.

Adaptive Non-Verbal Communication Driven by Real-Time Student Feedback

The third emerging theme highlights the adaptive, bi-directional nature of instructors' non-verbal communication. Rather than deploying static non-verbal behaviors, teachers continuously monitored students' non-verbal cues—such as puzzled facial expressions, slumped postures, or breaking eye contact—and dynamically adjusted their instructional strategies in real time.

When observational field notes captured signs of student confusion during a complex instruction demonstration, instructors immediately modified their delivery. They incorporated exaggerated hand movements, slowed down physical demonstrations, or repeated key gestural cues. Similarly, when signs of fatigue or disinterest emerged, instructors adapted their proxemic behavior by moving closer to disengaged student clusters or using dramatic facial expressions to reignite interest. Teacher II articulated this adaptive feedback loop:

"Their reactions indicate my subsequent actions; if they appear perplexed, I incorporate gestures; if they seem fatigued, I approach them or alter my expression."

This finding proves that instructor NVC is not a unilateral broadcast, but a responsive, interactive dialogue. By reading student cues and adjusting their non-verbal behavior accordingly, instructors successfully sustained student engagement and optimized the flow of learning.

Posture and Spatial Dynamics as Dual Indicators of Authority and Approachability

The final theme illustrates the powerful pedagogical impact of posture and spatial dynamics (proxemics) in regulating classroom climate and power relations. Instructors strategically manipulated their physical location and posture to alternate between establishing instructional authority and fostering approachability.

Observational data indicated that instructors utilized the front of the classroom—standing with an erect posture to signal formal instruction, assert authority, and maintain general discipline. However, during student-centered practice or group demonstrations, instructors actively moved away from the podium and circulated around the room. Decreasing physical distance served a dual function: it maintained quiet supervision while simultaneously signaling readiness to assist struggling students. Students interpreted these spatial transitions positively. As noted in student feedback excerpts collected during post-observation inquiries:

"When the teacher circulates, I perceive her as both evaluating us and prepared to assist."

This strategic use of space bridged the physical and psychological gap between teacher and students. An erect posture at the front conveyed gravity and focus, whereas a relaxed demeanor and close proximity during group activities conveyed openness and accessibility. Thus, proxemics and posture proved to be subtle yet highly effective mechanisms for maintaining discipline while creating a collaborative learning environment.

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated the integrated utilization of instructors' non-verbal communication (NVC) during classroom demonstrations in a vocational EFL context (SMKN 3 Banda Aceh) and examined its pedagogical impact on student comprehension and engagement. Rather than analyzing isolated non-verbal components, this research adopted a holistic, multimodal framework. The thematic findings revealed four interconnected dimensions: (1) the dual-operating mechanism of instinctual and intentional NVC; (2) NVC as multimodal pedagogical scaffolding; (3) real-time adaptive NVC driven by student feedback; and (4) posture and spatial movement as dual indicators of authority and approachability. The following sections discuss these findings in relation to broader theoretical perspectives, existing empirical literature, and practical pedagogical implications.

The Duality of Non-Verbal Communication: Balancing Instinct and Intentionality

The finding that instructor NVC operates simultaneously through subconscious instinct and strategic intention underscores the complex cognitive nature of teaching. When instructors instinctively mirrored grammatical temporalities through hand gestures such as moving hands backward for past tense and forward for future tense—they inadvertently converted abstract linguistic rules into physical, spatial representations. This spontaneous embodiment supports Goldin-Meadow's (2003) cognitive theory of gesture, which posits that hand movements reflect and support internal cognitive processing during communication.

Concurrently, the deliberate deployment of targeted cues (e.g., thumbs-up signs, structured eye gaze, and turn-allocation gestures) confirms that NVC functions as an intentional pedagogical tool. This duality aligns with the findings of Keskin-Senkal et al. (2024), who observed that teacher experience directly shapes the intentionality of visual gaze and non-verbal pacing. In the context of EFL instruction, where verbal language alone may be insufficient for low-proficiency learners, combining spontaneous expressiveness with strategic non-verbal cues allows teachers to maintain instructional momentum without interrupting the communicative flow.

NVC as Multimodal Scaffolding and Cognitive Load Reduction

A central contribution of this study is the conceptualization of instructor NVC as a system of *multimodal pedagogical scaffolding*. In vocational EFL classrooms, students frequently encounter vocabulary and abstract grammatical structures that induce cognitive overload. The observational data demonstrated that when instructors combined spoken explanations with continuous gestural modeling—such as circular hand motions

for the *present continuous tense*—students were able to anchor abstract linguistic concepts to concrete visual representations.

This finding strongly aligns with Lopez-Ozieblo (2024), who reported that instructional gestures facilitate the comprehension of abstract grammar in second language learning. From a cognitive load perspective (Sweller, 2011), delivering information through dual modalities (auditory verbal explanations paired with visual non-verbal cues) distributes cognitive processing across the working memory, thereby reducing cognitive friction and enhancing retention. Furthermore, the observation that students mirrored the instructor's gestures during peer interactions indicates that instructional NVC is not merely passively received; rather, it is internalized as a semiotic resource for active knowledge co-construction.

Socio-Emotional Dynamics, Affective Scaffolding, and Local ELT Contexts

Beyond cognitive clarification, the results highlight the profound affective impact of instructor NVC. Positive facial affect, affirmative nodding, and open eye contact served as affective scaffolding, mitigating foreign language anxiety and promoting student participation. These results resonate with local empirical evidence from Indonesia, such as Muhayyung et al. (2023), who demonstrated that instructor eye contact enhances student motivation, and Istiqamah et al. (2023), who found that teacher smiles foster enthusiasm and emotional comfort.

In the broader context of English language teaching in Indonesia, creating an emotionally supportive classroom environment is critical for overcoming learner inhibition. Scholars examining Indonesian ELT practices, notably Muluk et al. (2020) and Muluk et al. (2021), emphasize that effective English instruction—particularly in vocational and secondary school settings—requires teachers to employ flexible, interactive, and culturally responsive pedagogical strategies. As Muluk et al. (2021) argue, language learning in Indonesian classrooms flourishes when instructors create low-anxiety communicative spaces where non-verbal signals complement verbal input, enabling students with limited English proficiency to feel valued and comprehensible. Thus, instructor non-verbal immediacy acts as a vital socio-emotional bridge that transforms rigid instructional spaces into interactive learning communities.

Interactive Feedback Loops and Adaptive Pedagogy

The emergent theme of adaptive NVC illustrates that non-verbal communication is an interactive, bi-directional dialogue rather than a unilateral broadcast. Instructors continuously read student non-verbal feedback—such as confused facial expressions or disengaged postures—and dynamically adjusted their delivery by exaggerating gestures, altering gaze patterns, or modifying proximity. This responsive adaptation supports the findings of Hu and Wang (2023), who observed that teacher responsiveness to student non-verbal cues reduces instruction misinterpretation and heightens engagement.

This finding reinforces the concept of *adaptive teaching*, where effective educators constantly evaluate real-time classroom feedback to calibrate their instructional pacing. By treating student non-verbal cues as diagnostic data, instructors can make immediate pedagogical adjustments without halting the lesson to ask formal comprehension questions.

Spatial Dynamics, Proxemics, and Classroom Management

The strategic manipulation of posture and proxemics during classroom demonstrations highlights the negotiation of authority and approachability in vocational classrooms. Standing erect at the front of the room established formal authority and focused group attention during instructional demonstrations, whereas circulating through the room during task execution reduced physical and psychological distance.

This spatial flexibility echoes the findings of Andon and Echeverría (2020), who noted that teacher mobility acts as a powerful supervisory and supportive mechanism. In

vocational education (SMK), where learning tasks are often hands-on and practice-oriented, physical proximity signals accessibility, encouraging students to seek assistance without feeling intimidated. Proxemic movement thus serves a dual function: it maintains discipline through active teacher presence while simultaneously fostering a collaborative, student-centered learning environment.

Pedagogical Implications and Limitations

The findings of this study have important implications for language teacher education and professional development. First, teacher training programs should move beyond a sole focus on verbal language methodology and explicitly integrate training on *multimodal non-verbal competence*. Language teachers should be trained to become consciously aware of their gestural repertoire, eye contact distribution, and spatial dynamics to maximize instructional clarity. Second, instructors should be encouraged to treat non-verbal communication as a deliberate scaffolding strategy, particularly when teaching complex language structures in EFL contexts.

However, several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in a single vocational high school (SMKN 3 Banda Aceh) with a small sample of instructors, which limits the statistical generalizability of the findings. Second, while student perspectives were captured through casual feedback and observational responses, future research could incorporate quantitative eye-tracking technology or video-stimulated recall interviews with students to measure the precise cognitive impact of specific gestural cues. Future studies should also investigate how cultural background interacts with non-verbal cue interpretation across diverse Indonesian educational settings.

CONCLUSION

Thematic analysis of classroom observations and interviews revealed four themes: Gestures improve instructional clarity and manage classroom engagement. Facial expressions offer emotional support, motivation, and feedback. Eye contact captivates learners and upholds classroom discipline. Posture and movement convey authority while enhancing accessibility. These topics highlight the educational importance of non-verbal communication in instructors' classroom presentations and its essential role in promoting effective teaching and learning in EFL environments. The results indicate that instructors' nonverbal communication is both instinctive and deliberate. Gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and movement were employed concurrently to convey message, govern interaction, and control behavior. The data reveals that NVC facilitated understanding by serving as multimodal scaffolding. Gestures rendered abstract language intelligible, facial emotions encouraged reluctant learners, and gaze directed attention. The teacher's closeness decreased distractions, whereas adaptive nonverbal communication facilitated response to student requirements. The findings align with recent evidence indicating that non-verbal communication strategies diminish ambiguity, elevate motivation, and cultivate positive classroom environments. Overall, non-verbal communication augmented students' comprehension by not only reinforcing meaning but also by establishing relational connections that rendered the classroom more interactive and engaging.

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