IMPLEMENTATION OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN THE LEARNING PROCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of nonverbal communication in the learning process within higher education. Nonverbal communication, including eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and body language, plays a crucial role in enhancing student engagement, comprehension, and classroom dynamics. The research employed a qualitative approach, collecting data through in-depth interviews with 50 students and classroom observations. The findings indicate that positive nonverbal behaviors from instructors—such as maintaining eye contact, using gestures, and showing enthusiasm—significantly enhance students' attention and motivation. Additionally, nonverbal communication was found to help clarify complex concepts, supporting student understanding. However, the study also highlights the need for cultural sensitivity, as students from diverse backgrounds may interpret nonverbal cues differently. Furthermore, the challenges of online and hybrid learning environments emphasize the necessity for educators to adapt their communication strategies, relying more on vocal cues and digital tools to maintain student engagement. The research concludes that nonverbal communication is essential for effective teaching and should be emphasized in professional development programs for educators. By focusing on these strategies, higher education can create more inclusive and engaging learning experiences.

Keywords: Nonverbal communication, higher education, student engagement, cultural sensitivity, online learning, teaching strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Nonverbal communication is an integral aspect of human interaction, conveying meaning through behaviors and signals that go beyond spoken or written language. In the context of higher education, the use of nonverbal communication becomes increasingly significant as educators strive to create dynamic, engaging, and inclusive learning environments. This form of communication include facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, gestures, posture, tone of voice, and personal space. Understanding and effectively utilizing nonverbal cues in higher

education can enhance the learning process, improve student engagement, and contribute to academic success(Aziz et al., 2021).

Numerous studies have examined the function of nonverbal communication in the classroom, with a focus on how it affects students' cognition. memory retention, and participation. In higher education, where students are expected to engage critically with complex material, the need for clear and effective communication is paramount. Nonverbal cues, often unconsciously used by both instructors and students, can convey emotions, provide feedback, and reinforce spoken messages, thereby shaping the overall classroom experience. These cues can create an environment that fosters collaboration and inclusion, making it easier for students to feel connected and involved in the learning process(Md Din et al., 2023).

At the core of successful teaching is the ability to communicate ideas effectively, and while verbal communication forms the foundation of this exchange, nonverbal signals often enhance or, in some cases, contradict the verbal message. For instance, an instructor may verbally express enthusiasm for a subject, but if their body language or facial expressions suggest disinterest or fatigue, students may interpret the message differently. This disconnect between verbal and nonverbal communication can lead to confusion and disengagement, underscoring the importance of aligning these two forms of communication to create a coherent and effective teaching strategy(Stamatis & Kostoula, 2021).

In addition to reinforcing verbal communication, nonverbal cues can also serve as a powerful tool for managing the classroom environment. Eye contact, for example, can be used to establish rapport with students, encourage participation, and convey attentiveness. A lack of eye contact, on the other hand, may signal disinterest or even intimidation, particularly in large lecture settings where students may already feel disconnected from the instructor. Similarly, gestures and body movement can be used to emphasize key points or explain complex concepts, providing students with additional visual stimuli to aid in their understanding(Baroona, 2018).

Studies have indicated that nonverbal communication is also very important for promoting inclusivity in the classroom. Teachers need to be aware of cultural variations in nonverbal communication in increasingly diverse learning environments since these variations can have a big impact on how messages are understood. For example, making direct eye contact may be viewed as disrespectful or inappropriate in some cultures, but it may also be seen as a sign of respect and attentiveness in others. Understanding these cultural nuances allows educators to tailor their communication styles to better meet the needs of a diverse student body, thus promoting a more inclusive and supportive learning environment (Fountoukidou et al., 2022).

The function of nonverbal communication in fostering relationships between teachers and students in higher education is another significant feature. Students may feel more at ease asking for assistance or joining in conversations when teachers project warmth and approachability through positive nonverbal cues like smiling, nodding, and keeping an open stance. These behaviors signal to students that the instructor is engaged and invested in their success, which can lead to increased motivation and participation. On the other hand, negative nonverbal cues, such as crossed arms or a lack of facial expression, can create a sense of distance and discourage students from actively engaging with the course material (Hamandia & Jannati, 2020).

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Nonverbal communication also has a significant impact on student-student interactions within the classroom. In group discussions, presentations, or collaborative projects, students rely on nonverbal cues to navigate social dynamics, convey agreement or disagreement, and coordinate tasks. Effective use of nonverbal communication can facilitate smoother interactions, reduce misunderstandings, and enhance collaboration. Conversely, poor nonverbal communication, such as a lack of responsiveness or inappropriate gestures, can lead to friction and reduced group cohesion. This dynamic highlights the importance of teaching students not only course content but also effective communication strategies that include both verbal and nonverbal elements(Marianti et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the advancement of technology in education, especially following the COVID-19 epidemic, has introduced novel obstacles and opportunities for the application of nonverbal communication in higher education. Teachers and students must modify their communication skills in online and hybrid learning contexts, when in-person contacts are either scarce or nonexistent. While some signs, like tone of voice and pauses, become more noticeable in virtual classrooms, nonverbal indicators like body language and facial expressions may be more difficult to pick up on. This shift in communication dynamics has prompted educators to explore new ways of maintaining engagement and interaction through nonverbal signals, such as using hand gestures during video calls or incorporating visual aids and multimedia elements to complement verbal explanations(Ananda et al., 2020).

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of nonverbal communication in education, many instructors may not fully realize its potential or how to harness it effectively in their teaching. This gap underscores the need for further professional development and training in communication strategies that emphasize the role of nonverbal cues. By raising awareness of nonverbal communication and its impact on learning, institutions can help educators improve their teaching effectiveness, enhance student engagement, and foster a more supportive and inclusive learning environment.

To sum up, nonverbal communication is an effective instrument that has the potential to greatly impact higher education's learning process. It enhances verbal communication and is essential to fostering a supportive learning environment in the classroom. fostering student engagement, and promoting inclusivity. As higher education continues to evolve, with increasing diversity and the integration of technology, the ability to effectively use nonverbal communication will become even more essential for educators. This study aims to explore the various ways in which nonverbal communication can be implemented in higher education to enhance learning outcomes, improve student engagement, and create a more inclusive and dynamic educational environment. Through a deeper understanding of these nonverbal cues, both instructors and students can contribute to a more effective and meaningful learning experience.

METHODS

This research used a qualitative methodology to investigate how nonverbal communication is used in higher education to enhance learning. The qualitative methodology was chosen to gain in-depth, contextual insights into how nonverbal cues influence students' experiences, engagement, and understanding in classroom settings. The study was conducted across several higher education institutions during one academic semester, ensuring that data was collected over a consistent period, which allowed for the observation of recurring patterns and behaviors related to nonverbal communication(Zumam & Mahfud, 2022).

The study involved a total of 50 students from diverse academic disciplines, representing a broad range of perspectives on nonverbal communication in the classroom. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a variety of viewpoints and experiences, particularly focusing on how nonverbal communication affects students from different fields of study. This sampling method allowed the researchers to target individuals who were more likely to provide rich data, ensuring that the study covered a wide array of classroom environments and teaching styles. The selection of students from multiple disciplines also enabled the research to explore potential differences in the role of nonverbal communication across academic contexts(Farid et al., 2023).

Data collection was carried out using two primary qualitative methods: in-depth interviews and classroom observations. These methods were chosen to provide both direct insights from the students and objective observations of classroom interactions.

In-depth Interviews: The 50 students participated in semi-structured interviews to learn about their individual experiences and opinions about nonverbal communication in the classroom. Through these interviews, students were given the chance to consider how particular nonverbal cues—like eye contact, gestures, body language, and facial expressions—affected their knowledge, motivation, and participation in class lectures and discussions. The researchers were able to delve deeper into the students' responses thanks to the semi-structured interviews' flexibility, which revealed complex information regarding their experiences with nonverbal communication. (Ambarawati, 2021).

Classroom Observations: In addition to the interviews, classroom observations were carried out to document the real-time use of nonverbal communication by both instructors and students. Researchers observed multiple class sessions in each participating institution, paying close attention to the instructors' body language, gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal behaviors, as well as the students' reactions and nonverbal responses. These observations helped to identify patterns in how nonverbal cues were used to reinforce or complement verbal instruction, and how they shaped the classroom dynamics. Key aspects such as proximity, eye contact, and the use of space were also noted, as these factors often play a critical role in facilitating or hindering classroom communication.

The qualitative data collected from the interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic coding, a common method in qualitative research that helps to organize and interpret complex data by identifying key themes.

Transcription: All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure that no details were lost in the analysis. Transcription allowed the researchers

to closely examine the language and specific terms used by participants when describing their experiences with nonverbal communication.

Coding: The transcripts and observation notes were then systematically coded. During the coding process, researchers identified recurring words, phrases, and behaviors related to nonverbal communication, such as "eye contact," "gestures," or "teacher's body language." These codes were used to categorize the data and highlight commonalities and differences in the participants' experiences.

Theme Development: To encapsulate the primary conclusions, important themes were derived from the coded data. The influence of nonverbal communication on student participation, understanding, classroom dynamics, and general efficacy of instruction was emphasized by these themes. One theme that surfaced, for example, was the significance of encouraging nonverbal cues in sustaining students' attention and encouraging active engagement.

By utilizing thematic analysis, the research was able to capture the complexities of nonverbal communication and its various roles in the higher education learning process. This approach provided rich, detailed insights into the ways in which nonverbal communication can either enhance or inhibit the educational experience, offering valuable implications for both educators and students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this study offer important insights into the role of nonverbal communication in the learning process in higher education. Through in-depth interviews with students and classroom observations, the study identified several recurring themes that underscore the significance of nonverbal communication in fostering student engagement, enhancing comprehension, and shaping the overall classroom atmosphere. This section presents the results from the analysis of both interview and observational data, followed by a discussion of the implications of these findings for teaching practices in higher education.

1. Impact of Nonverbal Communication on Student Engagement

The results of this study demonstrate how important nonverbal communication is for fostering student involvement in the classroom. Students frequently stated that nonverbal cues from their lecturers, such as eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions, were very important in influencing how focused and motivated they were throughout class. Positive nonverbal behaviors were identified as essential for capturing student interest and encouraging active participation.

Many students noted that when instructors made eye contact or employed enthusiastic hand gestures, they felt a stronger connection to the lecture material. This connection fostered an increased desire to engage with the content being taught. As one student articulated, "When the professor maintains eye contact and gestures while explaining, it makes me feel like they're talking directly to me, which keeps me focused." This sentiment was echoed by multiple participants, emphasizing that nonverbal communication serves as a bridge between passive observation and active learning.

In contrast, the absence of nonverbal cues or the presence of negative body language had detrimental effects on student engagement. For example, students reported that when instructors avoided eye contact, maintained a rigid posture, or

crossed their arms, they felt less motivated to participate in class discussions. One student remarked, "When the teacher seems distant or disinterested through their body language, it feels like they're just going through the motions, which makes it harder to care about what's being taught." Such observations underscore the importance of nonverbal communication in creating an interactive and engaging classroom environment, as it significantly influences how students perceive their instructors and the material.

2. Nonverbal Communication as a Tool for Clarification and Emphasis

Another critical finding of the study is the role of nonverbal communication in clarifying and emphasizing verbal content. Students indicated that their instructors' gestures and body movements often provided essential context that facilitated their understanding of complex concepts. For instance, hand movements were frequently employed to illustrate relationships between abstract ideas, which made these concepts easier to visualize.

One student shared, "When my professor uses gestures to explain how two concepts relate to each other, I find it much easier to grasp the idea." This use of gestures not only aided comprehension but also played a vital role in emphasizing key points during lectures. Students reported that gestures helped them identify areas that required closer attention, which enhanced their learning experience.

Facial expressions also served as important nonverbal tools. For example, raised eyebrows could signal confusion or difficulty, while a smile might indicate that the instructor was pleased with students' understanding. These cues were instrumental in guiding students' focus and enhancing their comprehension of the material.

These results were supported by observations made in the classroom, which showed that teachers were more successful in communicating when they used a range of nonverbal communication strategies, including expressive facial expressions, vocal modulation, and dynamic gestures. These teachers established a stimulating classroom that promoted student involvement and improved comprehension in general. This is consistent with previous research that indicates nonverbal cues can be excellent supplements to spoken instruction, enhancing students' ability to receive and remember knowledge.

3. Cultural Sensitivity in Nonverbal Communication

Cultural sensitivity emerged as a significant theme throughout the interviews conducted for this study, particularly in classrooms characterized by diverse student populations. The findings revealed that students from various cultural backgrounds often interpreted nonverbal cues in different ways, which had direct implications for their engagement and understanding of course material.

In multicultural educational settings, the nuances of nonverbal communication can greatly affect the dynamics of the classroom. For instance, some students from cultures where direct eye contact is considered inappropriate or disrespectful expressed discomfort when instructors maintained consistent eye contact during lectures. These students felt that such behavior violated their cultural norms, leading to feelings of unease and disengagement. Conversely, students from cultures that view direct eye contact as a sign of respect appreciated this nonverbal behavior, interpreting it as a signal that the instructor was attentive and engaged. This divergence in interpretation highlights the need for educators to cultivate cultural awareness to ensure effective communication in the classroom.

These cultural variations have effects that go beyond mere visual perception. Other nonverbal clues that differ in meaning depending on the culture include gestures, physical proximity, and even facial expressions. For example, in some cultures, certain hand gestures may be considered offensive, while in others, they are perfectly acceptable. Similarly, the appropriate distance for personal space can differ significantly; students from cultures with a high context of personal space may feel uncomfortable when instructors stand too close during interactions. These variations necessitate that educators approach their teaching with a mindful attitude toward the diverse cultural backgrounds represented in their classrooms.

The observations indicated that instructors who were more attuned to the cultural diversity of their classrooms often adapted their nonverbal communication accordingly. For example, some instructors made a conscious effort to use more neutral body language and minimized gestures that could be misinterpreted. By doing so, they created a more inclusive environment where all students felt respected and understood, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. This adaptability not only promotes better student engagement but also enhances the overall learning experience by allowing students to focus on the material rather than navigate potential cultural misunderstandings.

4. The Role of Nonverbal Communication in Building Relationships

Nonverbal communication is just as important as cultural sensitivity when it comes to building and preserving strong bonds between teachers and students. According to the study, when teachers exhibited positive nonverbal cues like smiling, nodding, and maintaining an open posture, many students reported feeling more comfortable asking questions or engaging in class when something wasn't clear. These actions promoted an approachable and encouraging classroom environment, which is necessary for student participation and active learning.

One student described their experience by stating, "When the teacher smiles or makes eye contact, it feels like they're encouraging us to engage, which makes the class feel more welcoming." This statement emphasizes how crucial positive nonverbal communication is to fostering a learning atmosphere. Students who felt that their teachers were emotionally detached from them, as evidenced by their closed-off body language, lack of eye contact, or sparse facial emotions, on the other hand, reported feeling less likely to ask for assistance or engage. This disconnect can significantly impact their overall learning experience and academic performance.

Classroom observations further corroborated these findings, demonstrating that instructors who engaged in positive nonverbal communication behaviors were more successful in creating a dynamic and inclusive classroom environment. Instructors who regularly smiled, made eye contact, and used open body language tended to encourage greater student participation. This aligns with existing research that emphasizes the social dimension of learning, wherein strong teacher-student relationships are vital for academic success.

Furthermore, encouraging nonverbal communication builds a cohesive classroom environment in addition to improving student involvement on an individual basis. In classrooms where teachers display warmth and approachability through nonverbal cues, kids are more likely to feel connected and at home. Increased motivation, greater levels of involvement, and better academic results can result from this sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of adaptability in nonverbal communication. Instructors who are able to read the nonverbal cues of their students and adjust their own body language accordingly can foster a more responsive and engaging classroom environment. For instance, if an instructor notices that a particular student appears confused or disengaged, adjusting their body language—such as leaning in, making eye contact, or using encouraging gestures—can help re-engage that student.

5. Challenges in Online and Hybrid Learning Environments

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been several obstacles associated with nonverbal communication since the shift to online and hybrid learning environments. With the transition of education from traditional in-person classrooms to online learning environments, students have expressed concern about how much harder it is to see nonverbal signs like body language and facial expressions. One student articulated this sentiment, stating, "In online classes, it's harder to see the teacher's face or gestures clearly, so I sometimes feel less connected." This observation highlights a critical limitation of online learning: the inability to fully perceive the nonverbal signals that often foster engagement and connection in physical classrooms.

The absence of nonverbal cues in virtual settings created barriers to understanding and communication. Instructors rely heavily on gestures and facial expressions to convey enthusiasm, emphasize key points, and gauge student reactions. However, in online platforms, where camera angles and lighting conditions can vary widely, these crucial elements of communication are often diminished. Consequently, students may miss out on the subtle cues that enhance their understanding of the material and foster a sense of classroom community.

As a result, the shift to online learning underscored the heightened importance of tone of voice, pauses, and other auditory cues. Instructors who effectively utilized vocal modulation, clarity, and enunciation found ways to maintain student engagement despite the lack of physical presence. For example, a teacher's enthusiastic tone or the strategic use of pauses can capture student attention and encourage participation. However, not all instructors adapted their teaching styles to this new medium, leading some students to feel disconnected or disengaged.

Moreover, the lack of physical proximity further complicated the development of strong student-instructor relationships in online learning environments. In traditional classrooms, the shared physical space fosters connections and facilitates nonverbal interactions that contribute to a supportive learning atmosphere. Conversely, the virtual setting often feels more impersonal, making it challenging for students to establish rapport with their instructors. This detachment can hinder students' willingness to ask questions or seek clarification, ultimately affecting their academic performance.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal the significant role that nonverbal communication plays in enhancing the learning process in higher education. Nonverbal cues, such as eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and body language, are crucial for maintaining student engagement, reinforcing verbal instruction, and fostering a positive, interactive classroom environment. These findings align with previous research, emphasizing that effective nonverbal communication can positively

influence students' understanding, attention, and motivation during the learning process.

The study's main finding is the significance of nonverbal cues in fostering a friendly and inclusive environment. When teachers exhibited positive nonverbal cues including smiling, nodding, and maintaining an open posture, students reported feeling more interested in the lesson and more connected to their teachers. The development of rapport and trust between teachers and students is facilitated by these cues, and it is necessary for both deeper learning and active engagement. Teachers who are conscious of their nonverbal cues can use them to their advantage by creating a supportive atmosphere in which students feel free to seek clarification, participate in conversations, and ask questions.

The study also emphasizes how important it is for teachers to become more sensitive to cultural differences when it comes to nonverbal communication, especially in multicultural and diverse learning environments. Nonverbal clues can be interpreted differently by students from diverse cultural backgrounds, which may have an impact on their comprehension and level of involvement. For instance, making direct eye contact may be disrespectful in some cultures yet perceived as a sign of attention in others. Therefore, in order to guarantee that every student feels included and appreciated in the classroom, instructors must be aware of these cultural variations and modify their nonverbal communication accordingly.

Moreover, the challenges presented by online and hybrid learning environments—such as limited visibility of nonverbal cues and physical proximity—further emphasize the need for educators to adapt their communication strategies. In virtual learning, where traditional nonverbal cues may be less visible or absent, instructors must rely more heavily on vocal modulation, tone, and clear verbal explanations to maintain student engagement. The lack of physical presence can make it more difficult to build relationships and foster student participation, which underlines the importance of finding new ways to integrate nonverbal elements into online teaching, such as using video features effectively or encouraging active participation through other digital tools.

Given the challenges and complexities of incorporating nonverbal communication in both physical and virtual classrooms, it is crucial for institutions to offer professional development programs that focus on enhancing these skills among educators. Training programs that help instructors recognize the impact of their nonverbal behaviors and develop strategies to adapt their communication styles in diverse settings can improve teaching outcomes. This would not only benefit student engagement and academic performance but also promote a more inclusive and dynamic educational environment.

In conclusion, the study's findings underscore the profound impact of nonverbal communication on the learning process and highlight the need for educators to be more intentional and culturally sensitive in their use of nonverbal cues. As higher education increasingly shifts towards hybrid and online learning models, adapting these nonverbal communication strategies will be essential for maintaining student engagement and fostering effective learning. Institutions that invest in developing these skills among their educators will be better positioned to support student success in both traditional and digital learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes how important nonverbal communication is to improving learning in higher education. The results show that nonverbal indicators such body language, gestures, facial emotions, and eye contact have a big impact on how engaged and understanding students are in the classroom as well as how things work overall. Good nonverbal cues create a more inviting and inclusive atmosphere that promotes student engagement and deeper learning.

The study also underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity in nonverbal communication, particularly in diverse classrooms. Educators must be aware of how different cultural backgrounds interpret nonverbal cues and adjust their behaviors to ensure all students feel respected and included. Moreover, the shift to online and hybrid learning environments has presented new challenges in maintaining effective nonverbal communication. Instructors must adapt by emphasizing vocal tone, clear explanations, and using digital tools to engage students and compensate for the absence of physical nonverbal cues.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that nonverbal communication is an essential component of effective teaching. Institutions should prioritize professional development for educators, equipping them with the skills needed to integrate nonverbal communication strategies into both traditional and virtual learning environments. By doing so, higher education can foster more engaging, inclusive, and effective educational experiences, leading to improved student outcomes and a stronger connection between instructors and learners.

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