



## Inspiring Through Interaction: The Impact of Teachers' Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication in EFL Classes

\*<sup>1</sup>Riki Ruswandi, <sup>1</sup>Muhamad Arief, <sup>1</sup>Novitasari

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Nusantara, Indonesia

**\*Correspondence:**

arief10191019@gmail.com

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### Abstract

Effective verbal communication, including clear explanations and constructive feedback, ensures that students comprehend the material and feel supported. Nonverbal communication, such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, significantly contributes to sustaining student engagement and motivation. This research examines teachers' various verbal and nonverbal communication techniques in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes and explores their impact on student motivation. The study involved two teachers and 57 students from senior high schools in Indonesia, employing a phenomenological qualitative approach. Data collection methods included observation checklists, interviews, and questionnaires. The analysis revealed that teachers utilized seven distinct verbal communication methods; lecturing, questioning, giving directions, providing praise and encouragement, and offering feedback; and seven nonverbal methods, including eye contact, hand movements, physical proximity, facial expressions, physical appearance, and chronemics (the strategic use of time). Among these, students rated suggestions, praise, and encouragement as the most motivating verbal interactions, while eye contact emerged as the most influential nonverbal factor. These findings underscore the need for targeted teacher training in these communication strategies to foster a more engaging and motivating learning environment, thereby enhancing student learning outcomes in Indonesian EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** Verbal communication. Non-verbal communication, students' motivation.

### INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the significance of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies for students' success is essential. Effective verbal communication, which includes clear instructions, constructive feedback, and encouraging words, helps students understand the material and feel supported in their learning journey. Non-verbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, and eye contact, is crucial in creating a conducive learning environment. These non-verbal cues can convey enthusiasm, empathy, and confidence, vital

for engaging students and fostering a positive classroom atmosphere. When teachers use positive verbal and non-verbal communication techniques, they can inspire and motivate students, making them more willing to participate and invest effort in their studies.

Furthermore, there are significant research concerns regarding the impact of communication strategies on student motivation. Studies indicate that teachers' interactions with students profoundly affect their motivation levels in the classroom. Effective communication enables instructors to establish a strong presence, which motivates students and enhances the learning process (Agricola et al., 2019; Duta et al., 2015). Teachers who excel in communication skills can create a more conducive and successful teaching and learning environment (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). A crucial area of investigation is the influence of verbal and non-verbal communication techniques on the motivation and engagement of students. Teachers' ability to communicate effectively verbally and non-verbally is critical in shaping students' motivation and, ultimately, their academic success.

Verbal communication encompasses all spoken or written interactions used to engage with others in daily activities. Research has identified several critical verbal strategies crucial for successful classroom communication and students' motivation and engagement. These strategies include lecturing, giving questions, giving directions, and giving feedback. Lecturing involves planning, setting objectives, and providing clear and structured information about the subject matter, which is fundamental for students' understanding (Kennedy, 2015). Asking questions stimulates critical thinking and active participation (Bezanilla et al., 2019), while clear directions help guide students' activities and tasks, and constructive feedback allows students to improve and learn from their learning experiences (Amerstorfer & Von Münster-Kistner, 2021). Teacher-student interaction is vital in the classroom (Simonds & Cooper, 2013). Practical verbal communication skills enable teachers to understand and address students' issues, creating an environment where students feel heard and encouraged (Liu, 2022).

Besides, there is a strong relationship between verbal and non-verbal communication, as they are intrinsically linked and cannot be separated. Non-verbal communication supports and enhances verbal messages, allowing teachers to establish certain presumptions in the other person's mind and clarify the meaning of a message (Jakonen & Evnitskaya, 2020). Non-verbal communication improves knowledge transfer and retention, and teachers primarily rely on these cues to interact with students (Davis, 2018). In educational settings, certain types of non-verbal cues are essential, such as kinesics, which involves body movements and hand gestures, as well as facial expressions, eye contact, and physical appearance (Wang & Loewen, 2015). These cues play a crucial role in conveying information, emotions, and attitudes that complement and reinforce verbal communication. Furthermore, effective non-verbal communication can convey warmth, connection, psychological closeness, and openness to communication, all essential for creating a positive and engaging classroom environment (Ayuningsih et al., 2022).

Several studies have researched verbal and non-verbal communication, highlighting their importance in educational settings. Matsumoto (2018) analyzed interactional conflicts in writing classrooms at a U.S. university, focusing on how students use non-verbal resources like silence, gaze, and gestures to manage disagreements. The study emphasizes the need for educators to understand these non-verbal cues to transform conflicts into learning

opportunities. Besides, [Beege et al. \(2020\)](#) examined the impact of gestures in educational videos. The study found that deictic (signaling) gestures significantly enhance learning outcomes by improving retention and engagement, whereas rhythmic (beat) gestures did not have the same positive effect. The findings suggest that specific non-verbal communication, like deictic gestures, is more effective in educational contexts. In addition, [Wahyuni \(2018\)](#) explored the impact of verbal and non-verbal communication on student performance. The study highlighted that effective communication is crucial for knowledge transfer and that teachers' verbal and non-verbal styles significantly influence students' ability to understand and complete tasks.

Moreover, a study by [Lin et al. \(2016\)](#) investigated how student perceptions of instructors' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness relate to perceptions of classroom communication climate, student state motivation, and math anxiety. The results indicated that perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness directly affect perceptions of the classroom communication climate, influencing student motivation. Another study by [Van Der Veen et al. \(2017\)](#) examined the effect of productive classroom talk and metacommunication on young children's oral communicative competence and subject matter knowledge. The study found that dialogically organized classroom talk significantly improved children's oral language skills but did not substantially affect their subject matter knowledge. This suggests that interactive and dialogical communication is beneficial for developing oral communicative competence in young children.

Finally, those extensive researches above have been conducted on verbal and non-verbal communication, underscoring their significance in educational settings. However, more studies still need to address their impact on student motivation specifically. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the types of verbal and non-verbal communication teachers use in EFL classes and understand how these communication methods influence students' motivation in two senior high schools in Indonesia, namely SMA Istiqamah Bandung and SMA Pasundan 2 Bandung. By examining these specific communication strategies in the context of EFL education, the study seeks to provide insights into how these methods can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

## METHOD

To deepen the understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication use in EFL classrooms in Indonesian senior high schools, the researchers in this current study conducted a phenomenological study. A phenomenological design was employed to analyze perceived or experienced phenomena ([Flynn & Korcuska, 2018](#)), specifically focusing on the immediacy behaviors of teachers. This qualitative research aimed to explore the use of verbal and non-verbal communication by EFL teachers, the frequency of teachers' current immediacy behaviors in spontaneous micro-teachings, and its impact on students' learning gains, perceptions, and self-evaluations regarding their experiences. This was followed by analyzing the aspects of both verbal (lecturing, acceptance of feelings, giving questions, praise and encouragement, giving directions, giving feedback and students suggestions) and non-verbal immediacy (eye contact, hand movement, proximity, facial expression, physical appearance, haptics and chronemic).

The participants included 2 teachers and 57 students from two senior high schools in Indonesia, namely SMA Istiqamah Bandung and SMA Pasundan 2 Bandung. The study utilized classroom observations and questionnaires. All instruments were designed based on the teaching communication strategy indicators outlined in the Foreign Language Interaction Analysis System (FLINT) by Moskowitz (1971). For data analysis, all textual data were segmented and labeled with appropriate codes for better organization and data reduction. Overlapping codes were consolidated, and the remaining codes were grouped into themes. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was applied to identify common themes across participants' reports. An inductive orientation was maintained to establish logical links between the research objectives and the findings derived from the raw data. Additionally, the relationships among different data sources were carefully considered to avoid treating them as separate units while reporting findings.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

To understand the effectiveness of teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication strategies in EFL classrooms, an observation was conducted focusing on two teachers, Teacher A and Teacher B. The observation checklist was categorized into verbal and non-verbal communication aspects, evaluating various behaviors and strategies employed by the teachers.

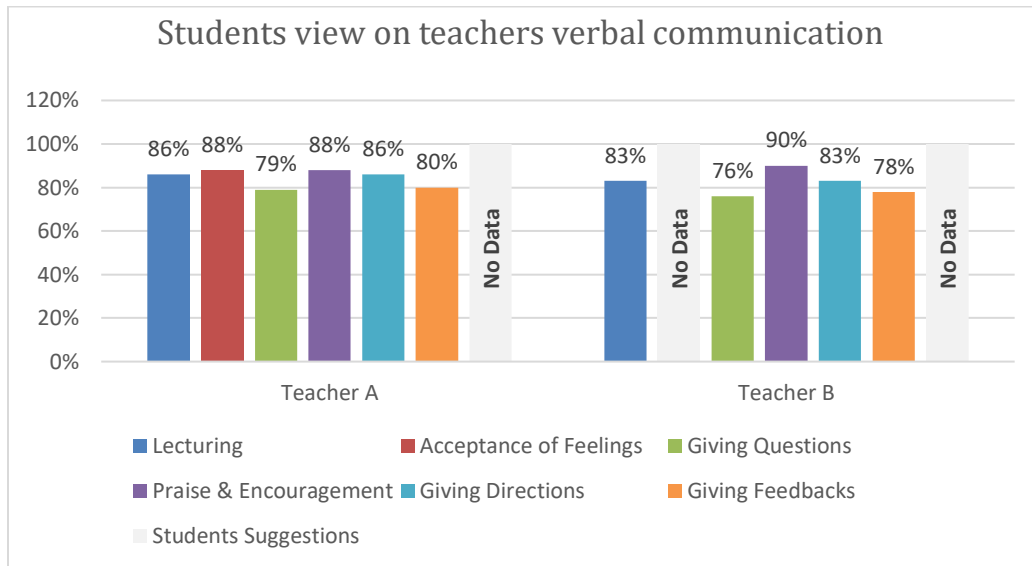
### *Verbal communication*

The following data is derived from observations using a checklist to document the implementation of verbal communication strategies by the two teachers who participated in this research.

**Table 1.** Observation result of teachers' verbal communication

Category	Aspects	Observation Checklist	
		Teacher A	Teacher B
Verbal Communication	Lecturing	Yes	Yes
	Acceptance of Feelings	Yes	No
	Giving Questions	Yes	Yes
	Praise & Encouragement	Yes	Yes
	Giving Directions	Yes	Yes
	Giving Feedbacks	Yes	Yes
	Students Suggestions	No	No

The following graph is from a student questionnaire result about the effectiveness of verbal communication strategies in enhancing their motivation during the learning process.



**Figure 1.** Impact of teachers' verbal communication strategies on students' motivation

Regarding verbal communication, both teachers utilized lecturing as a primary method to convey information to students. According to research by [Zakirman et al. \(2019\)](#), lecturing allows teachers to convey material effectively, clearly explain information, and accommodate students with various levels of ability. Both teachers effectively utilized lecturing, with Teacher A scoring 86% and Teacher B scoring 83%. These high scores indicate that students responded positively to structured information delivery, finding it helpful in understanding course material. The slight difference in scores suggests that while both teachers were effective, subtle differences in their lecturing styles or content delivery may affect student motivation.

However, there was a significant difference in their use of acceptance strategies. Teacher A consistently employed this strategy to validate students' emotions and encourage active participation, fostering a supportive environment. [Frenzel et al. \(2021\)](#) state that showing joy in teaching and positive, affectionate emotional experiences toward students can fuel positive relationships and promote supportive ways of instruction. Teacher A's effective implementation of this strategy is reflected in a high score of 88%. In contrast, Teacher B did not use this approach or engage in practices that acknowledged or accepted students' feelings, potentially missing an opportunity to enhance student motivation through emotional engagement and support.

Both teachers actively engaged students by asking questions and promoting interaction and participation. Teacher A asked questions to capture students' attention, recall previous topics, and clarify comprehension, scoring 79%. Teacher B, however, focused on giving clear instructions and asking questions to ensure understanding, scoring 76%. According to [Nguyen et al. \(2016\)](#), engaging students through questioning, responding to their queries, and encouraging volunteer information fosters interaction between teachers and peers during class. The close scores reflect that both teachers were relatively effective in engaging students through questioning, though Teacher A's slightly higher score may indicate a more interactive questioning style.

Both teachers used praise and encouragement to motivate students and reinforce positive behaviors. Praise and encouragement were among the most impactful strategies, with Teacher A scoring 88% and Teacher B slightly higher at 90%. Both teachers used positive reinforcement to motivate students, recognizing their efforts and achievements. This strategy's high effectiveness underscores its importance in maintaining a positive classroom atmosphere and boosting student confidence. According to [Sogunro \(2014\)](#), students are praised and rewarded with good grades when they perform well and receive poor grades when they do not.

On the other part, both teachers provided clear directions to guide students through tasks and activities, and feedback was consistently offered to help students improve and understand their progress. Giving directions received high marks, with Teacher A scoring 86% and Teacher B scoring 83%. Clear and precise instructions help students understand expectations and navigate tasks, essential for maintaining a well-organized and productive classroom. The effectiveness of this strategy highlights the teachers' abilities to guide students effectively through their learning activities. Giving feedback was similarly effective, with Teacher A scoring 80% and Teacher B scoring 78%.

Furthermore, both teachers demonstrated a strong capability in this area, ensuring that students received valuable input on their performance. Teachers who provide clear directions, daily schedules, goals, standards, assessments, scaffolding, mentoring, and feedback can fundamentally change classroom dynamics, enhancing students' engagement and performance ([Cheon et al., 2020](#)). For instance, Teacher A frequently implemented instructions to engage students, particularly for classroom tasks such as starting and ending the class and during learning sessions. Teacher B, on the other hand, gave clear instructions for student participation, such as asking students to raise their hands if they knew the answer to a question posed on the board. However, neither Teacher was observed accepting suggestions from students, indicating a potential area for improvement in fostering a more interactive and inclusive classroom environment.

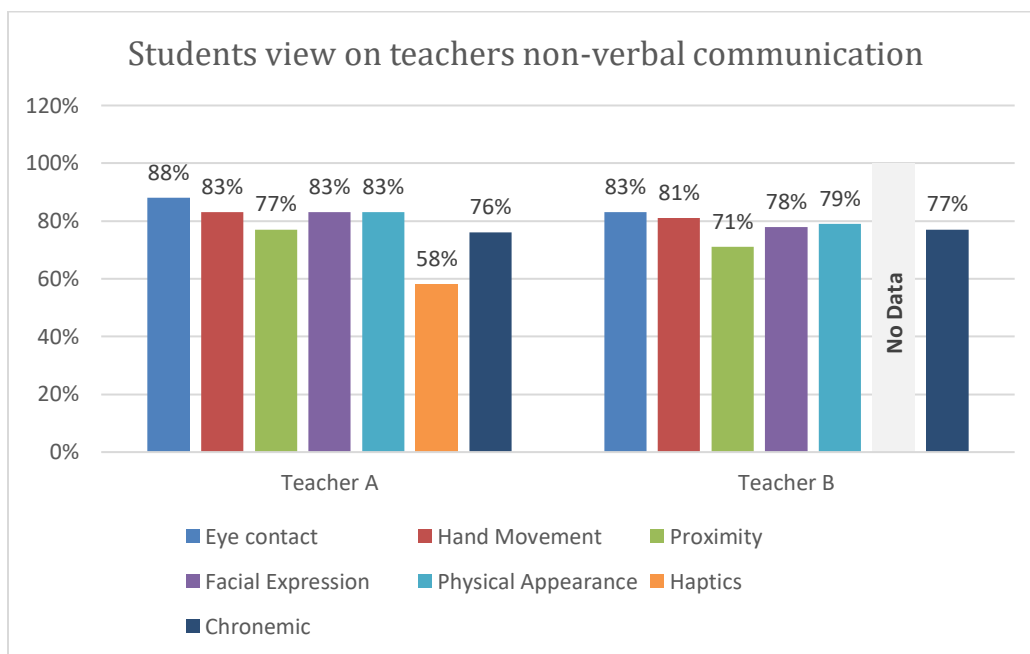
### ***Non-Verbal communication***

The following data is derived from observations using a checklist to document the implementation of non-verbal communication strategies by the two teachers who participated in this research.

**Table 2.** Observation result of teachers' non-verbal communication

Category	Aspects	Observation Checklist	
		Teacher A	Teacher B
Non-verbal Communication	Eye Contact	Yes	Yes
	Hand Movement	Yes	Yes
	Proximity	Yes	Yes
	Facial Expression	Yes	Yes
	Physical Appearance	Yes	Yes
	Haptics	Yes	No
	Chronemic	Yes	Yes

The following graph is from a student questionnaire about the effectiveness of nonverbal communication strategies in enhancing motivation during the learning process.



**Figure 2.** Impact of Teachers' non-verbal communication strategies on Students' motivation

Furthermore, regarding non-verbal communication, both teachers consistently maintained eye contact with students, which is crucial for building rapport and ensuring students feel acknowledged. Teacher A scored 88% for eye contact, indicating a solid ability to use this non-verbal strategy to maintain student engagement and build rapport. Eye contact makes students feel valued, significantly boosting their motivation. Teacher B also scored highly in this area, with 83%, suggesting a similar proficiency in eye contact to enhance classroom interaction and student motivation. According to [Martikainen \(2019\)](#), a smiling face and direct eye contact make students perceive teachers as eager to communicate. This perception fosters a more open and interactive classroom environment where students feel more comfortable participating and expressing their thoughts.

Moreover, both teachers used hand movements and gestures to emphasize points, aid in explanations, draw attention, point out students, and enhance understanding of the subject matter. Gestures capture a learner's attention and subsequently benefit learning. Certain gestures can support verbal explanations, particularly during one-on-one instruction ([Dargue & Sweller, 2019](#)). These non-verbal cues help make lessons more dynamic and engaging, improving comprehension and retention of the material. Teacher A scored 83%, and Teacher B scored 81% for their effective use of hand movements, highlighting their ability to use this non-verbal technique to influence students' motivation positively.

Proximity, or the physical closeness between the Teacher and students, was another effective strategy, with Teacher A scoring 77% and Teacher B scoring 71%. Teacher A's higher score indicates a more effective use of proximity to create an inclusive and interactive

learning environment. Physical appearance, including the Teacher's attire and grooming, also played a role in influencing students' perceptions of credibility and authority. Teacher A scored 83%, and Teacher B scored 79%. Maintaining a professional appearance can positively impact students' respect for the teacher and learning motivation. According to [Keiler \(2018\)](#), moving around the classroom and managing student behavior ensures that students stay on task. Reducing physical distance can help make students feel more connected and involved in classroom activities.

In addition, facial expressions, which convey emotions and reactions, were used effectively by both teachers. According to [Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour \(2017\)](#), facial expression is the most important source of information after language. Teacher A scored 83%, and Teacher B scored 78%. The use of facial expressions helps make communication more relatable and understandable, enhancing student engagement and motivation. Haptics, or using touch as a form of communication, showed a significant difference between the two teachers. Teacher A scored 58%, indicating occasional use of touch, such as patting on the back, to convey support and encouragement. As [Cekaite \(2016\)](#) states, by using sustained touch, the participants establish a corporeal perceptual field that affords their emerging, contingent verbal and embodied actions adjustments. However, Teacher B should have implemented this strategy, potentially missing an opportunity to enhance student motivation through physical reassurance. Chronemics, which refers to effective time management during lessons, was rated at 76% for Teacher A and 77% for Teacher B. Both teachers demonstrated a solid ability to pace their lessons appropriately, ensuring students could follow along and stay engaged without feeling rushed or bored. Both teachers managed their time effectively during lessons, providing a balanced pace, adequate coverage of material, and classroom management skills ([Dicke et al., 2015](#)).

## CONCLUSION

The study at SMA Istiqamah Bandung and SMA Pasundan emphasizes the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication in enhancing student engagement and motivation in English learning. Teacher A prioritized emotional support by recognizing students' feelings and providing thoughtful feedback, while Teacher B created an encouraging environment through consistent praise. Both teachers emphasized clear instructions and engaged students through questioning. Additionally, non-verbal communication, such as eye contact and hand movements, helped maintain student focus and complement verbal communication. Teacher A employed proximity and haptics more frequently to establish an inclusive environment, although both teachers effectively engaged students through facial expressions. It is worth noting that some students found touch-based communication uncomfortable, suggesting room for improvement in this area. The study underscores the need to integrate verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to boost student motivation and learning outcomes.

However, conducted in only two schools, the results may need to be more generalizable. The sample size was small, and data were gathered through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student surveys, introducing potential subjectivity. Additionally, the study needed to fully account for students' diverse backgrounds, which could influence their responses to various communication strategies. Future research should



explore a more extensive and diverse sample, including other educational settings, to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into the long-term effects of communication strategies on student engagement and learning outcomes. Expanding the use of surveys and interviews could further elucidate student perceptions of the effectiveness of various communication methods.

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