

Teacher's Communication Strategies for Enhancing Students' Speaking Motivation: Verbal and Non-Verbal

Andi Adisaturrehimi^{1*}, Sabrina Retnasari Iswahyudi², Fitri Amaliah Akbal³, Marlia⁴
Muhammad Astrianto Setiadi⁵

^{1, 2, 3 & 4} Universitas Negeri Makassar, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia.

⁵ Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia

*Correspondence to: adisaturrehimiandi@gmail.com

Abstract: This study investigated the impact of teacher's verbal and non-verbal communication strategies on students' motivation to speak in English. Specifically, it explored the types of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies employed by the teacher and examined how these strategies influence students' speaking motivation in the EFL context. A qualitative method was adopted, focusing on ninth-grade students at SMPN 1 Pallangga during the 2022–2023 academic year. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that the teacher employed 13 distinct of verbal strategies and eight forms of non-verbal communication strategies. The findings suggested that both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies positively contribute to enhancing students' motivation to speak in English, highlighting the importance of teacher-student interaction in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Teacher's communication strategies; students' speaking motivation; verbal; non-verbal

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial elements influencing foreign language acquisition is motivation (Zhu, 2014). For many Indonesian students, motivation is the primary issue, which is brought on by a variety of causes. The intricacy of English sentences, students' limited vocabulary, and the manner teachers present the content all have a significant impact on their motivation (Aflidayanti, 2022). In particular, the 2013 Curriculum states that the teacher's primary role is to support students' mastery of English. Teachers' ought to devise strategies for encouraging student participation in the classroom. It is the fundamental factor that might motivate someone to do action.

Students that are highly driven participate more actively in the learning process than students who are less motivated (Zhang, 2021). In many circumstances, students who are not driven will not do well. The students process by being very motivated. The demands of the teaching profession place a variety of duties and obligations on teachers. Promoting, motivating, and assisting students in their learning is the teacher's primary role and obligation. Research has shown that students' motivation in the classroom was impacted by their teachers' diligence. Armstrong and Hope (2016) found that for the four communication characteristics of challenging, nonverbal support, understanding and kind, encouragement and praise, there is a positive association between teacher communication and student motivation.

There seems to be a connection between certain aspects of a student's motivation and the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of their teacher. Teachers in particular need to be aware of, communicate with, and model elements of immediacy to teacher candidates because they are educators. According to Velez and Cano (2008), by utilizing humor in the classroom, encouraging students to speak, and being approachable and eager to engage with students outside of the classroom. In addition, to encouraging students to communicate, teachers should start modeling behaviors for students that will help them build the skills of verbal and nonverbal responsiveness outside of the classroom.

An internal motivation or force exists. One is motivated to do action in the direction of a goal by an internal state. Then there is an outside force, or incentive. It occurs when one's actions are influenced by an outside objective. According to Brown and Douglas (2000), motivation can be situational, global, or task-oriented, just as self-esteem. Additionally, motivation is frequently assessed in terms of the learner's internal and external motivations.

Verbal communication is the spoken language used while interacting with people (McCormack, 2010). Verbal communication is those that are transmitted through words, both written and spoken. While non-verbal communication is the deliberate or accidental exchange of meaning via nonverbal indicators such as body language and behavioral patterns (Patterson, 1995). A teacher's actions, including as eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, body placement, physical closeness, body movement, and personal touches, serve as a conduit for nonverbal interpersonal communication. The practice of communicating by sending and receiving wordless messages is often how teachers interact nonverbally.

According to Spada and Lightbown (1999), motivation in second language learning is difficult to investigate and can be attributed to two things: the communicative demands of the learners and their attitudes about the second language community. Furthermore, motivation is defined by Parsons et al. (2001) as a crucial element or component in the process of learning. To accomplish anything, motivation and learning are equally important. Learning causes us to acquire new information and abilities, and it also motivates us to continue learning.

To motivate students and ensure learning effectiveness, it is crucial to develop meaningful contact between the teacher and students. The researcher may see that this learning environment alters several things, including students' desire to study. Reduced student participation in class, declining student understanding, and declining student attendance all become barriers to restricted offline learning. As a result, few students really engage in studying English, and the majority lack motivation to do so. Some students just remained quiet as the teacher asked them questions on the lecture without making any comments about the English material.

Motivation is one of the key personality differences that has been shown to have a considerable impact on the success of language learning. In addition, Dörnyei (2009) summarize that the L2 motivational Self System highlights three main factors that drive learners to acquire a language: (a) the intrinsic drive to become proficient in the language, (b) external social pressure to master the language, and (c) the actual experience of learning a language.

For many reasons, students found it more difficult to master the lesson of English as a foreign language. Among them is a lack of drive. It was brought on by students' poor vocabulary knowledge and dull classroom interactions. Sometimes learning is an extremely

boring process. To bring the class to life, the teacher should act as a facilitator and carry out an engaging teaching process. Because it is the teacher's responsibility to provide lessons that support learning in the classroom. Because a teacher's actions in an English class will motivate students, it is believed that this study would reveal the optimal communication strategy to employ in order to increase student motivation in English as a Foreign Language, especially in SMPN 1 Pallangga. Additionally, it involves understanding how to use verbal communication in English classes effectively in light of students' limited vocabulary proficiency and their lack of desire. Nonverbal communication can also be utilized to complement verbal communication in this regard.

Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of motivation in second language acquisition, there remains a limited understanding of how teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication strategies specifically influence students' speaking motivation in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings. While previous studies (e.g., Armstrong & Hope, 2016; Bambaero & Shokrpour, 2017) have acknowledged the general impact of teacher communication on learner motivation and achievement, few have examined how these communicative behaviors function interactively in actual classroom settings to support students' willingness to speak—particularly within the Indonesian context.

This study aims to examine how teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication strategies affect students' motivation to speak English in an EFL classroom context at SMPN 1 Pallangga. It seeks to identify the types of communication strategies employed by teachers and evaluate their influence on students' motivational engagement during speaking activities.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research design, which is suitable for exploring the naturalistic settings of classroom interactions and capturing the nuanced features of both verbal and non-verbal communication behaviors (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the types and functions of communication strategies used by teachers and how these strategies influence students' motivation in an EFL context.

The analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication in this study was guided by Mehrabian's Immediacy Theory (2017), which defines immediacy as communicative behaviors—both verbal and non-verbal—that reduce perceived distance between communicators and promote psychological closeness. Additionally, Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2009) provided the framework for understanding student motivation, emphasizing the roles of intrinsic desires, external influences, and the learner's actual language learning experience. These frameworks were selected for their robust application in second language acquisition and classroom communication studies.

The research was conducted at SMPN 1 Pallangga, located on Jl. Pembangunan No. 3, Kecamatan Pallangga, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, during the second semester of the 2022–2023 academic year. This school was purposefully selected based on scientific and contextual considerations. First, SMPN 1 Pallangga represents a typical public junior high school in the Indonesian EFL context where challenges in student speaking motivation are evident. Second, the school had recently transitioned from limited online learning to face-to-face instruction, providing a rich context for observing communicative strategies in post-pandemic classroom interactions. These factors made it a relevant and practical site for exploring the research questions.

Participants in this study included one ninth-grade English teacher and her students, comprising five classes with approximately 20 students each. The purposive sampling technique was used to select both the teacher and classes, ensuring that participants met specific criteria relevant to the study—namely, recent experience with limited online instruction and current engagement in face-to-face EFL learning. This sampling strategy was chosen to provide meaningful insights into the real-world communicative behaviors of EFL teachers and their impact on student motivation.

Two main data collection instruments were employed: non-participant classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were conducted using video recordings of English instruction to capture authentic verbal and non-verbal communication. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain deeper insights into students' and the teacher's perceptions of these communication strategies and their motivational effects.

Data from video recordings and interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) qualitative data analysis model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Verbal and non-verbal communication indicators were identified and categorized according to the frameworks of Mehrabian (1969) and McCormack (2010), while patterns related to students' motivational responses were interpreted based on Dörnyei (2009).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Verbal Communication of the Teacher

Verbal communication in the classroom is fundamental for delivering knowledge, facilitating understanding, and building relational connections between teachers and students. According to Solomon and Theiss (2012), verbal communication involves the intentional use of language to transmit messages, create shared meanings, and structure interactions. In the observed EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom, thirteen forms of verbal communication were identified, each playing a pivotal role in student engagement and language learning.

Greeting Students Before Lessons

Opening the class with a greeting serves more than a mere ritualistic function; it fosters a positive classroom climate and psychologically prepares students to engage with the lesson. Warm greetings act as affective scaffolding, signaling care and attentiveness from the teacher, which, as supported by Hargreaves (2000), strengthens teacher-student relationships and creates emotional readiness for learning.

Praying Before and After Class

Initiating and closing class with prayer reflects not only spiritual grounding but also serves to establish a structured routine that may reduce anxiety and enhance emotional regulation. In sociocultural aligned educational contexts like Indonesia, prayer can act as a form of collective reflection and moral reinforcement (Pribadi, 2013), helping students center their attention and behaviour.

Taking Attendance

While procedural in nature, calling out students' names is a relational practice. It reinforces the teacher's awareness and attentiveness to individual learners. It also affirms student presence and involvement. This is consistent with Noddings' (2005) ethic of care in education, where recognition and acknowledgment are crucial components of educational success.

Encouraging Motivation Through Verbal Guidance

The teacher's consistent use of verbal prompts to motivate students aligns with the principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which asserts that learners thrive when they feel autonomous, competent, and related. Motivational messages reinforce the notion that students' efforts are meaningful, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation.

Calling Students by Name

Personalizing communication by addressing students by name promotes a sense of belonging and recognition. As per Schiefele (2015), students are more inclined to participate and feel valued when they are personally acknowledged, which enhances their academic engagement and self-worth.

Providing Feedback

Timely and constructive feedback serves as a critical driver of learning. The observed teacher's practice of offering affirming comments corresponds with Brookhart's (2008) recommendations for effective feedback, which emphasize clarity, specificity, and encouragement. Positive reinforcement, when authentic, nurtures a growth mindset among learners.

Incorporating Humour

The deliberate use of humour in instruction alleviates cognitive tension and enhances classroom rapport. Wanzer et al. (2010) suggest that humor, when appropriately used, increases student attentiveness, reduces anxiety, and fosters a memorable learning environment. It also humanizes the teacher, making learning interactions more enjoyable and dynamic.

Using Inclusive Pronouns ("we", "us")

Inclusive language constructs a shared identity and reinforces group cohesion. By using "we" and "us", the teacher positions herself as a co-learner and facilitator rather than an authoritative transmitter of knowledge. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, wherein learning is a collaborative and mediated process.

Switching Between English and Indonesian (Code-Switching)

The strategic use of both English and Indonesian serves as a scaffold for comprehension. Code-switching in multilingual classrooms is recognized as a legitimate pedagogical strategy (Macaro, 2009). It ensures that students grasp key concepts without sacrificing the target language's exposure, thereby optimizing both understanding and language acquisition.

Questioning Techniques

Effective questioning stimulates cognitive engagement and promotes dialogic learning. The teacher's frequent use of questions helps activate students' prior knowledge and facilitates formative assessment. According to Walsh (2011), questioning is central to communicative language teaching as it encourages interaction and negotiation of meaning.

Expressing Gratitude

Thanking students after their responses reinforces positive behaviour and creates a culture of respect. Gratitude, as an interpersonal act, fosters reciprocal appreciation and encourages continued participation. It also aligns with the principle of positive classroom discourse, which enhances motivation and self-efficacy.

Using Affectionate Terms like "Nak"

Referring to students as "nak" (a term of endearment in Indonesian) illustrates emotional closeness and parental warmth. This culturally grounded linguistic choice signals affection and care, echoing the findings of Garcia and Guerra (2004), who noted that culturally responsive teaching fosters inclusivity and emotional security.

Teaching Through Slideshows

Multimedia presentations serve as an effective tool for delivering complex content in accessible formats. Slideshows incorporate written communication, which according to Whiteman (2013), enhances message permanence and provides alternative modes for learner engagement. Visual aids support dual coding processes, improving retention and comprehension.

Non-Verbal Communication of the Teacher

Non-verbal communication constitutes a significant portion of interpersonal interaction, especially in EFL contexts where linguistic proficiency may be limited. According to Mehrabian (2017), the majority of communicative meaning is conveyed non-verbally through gestures, facial expressions, posture, and tone of voice. The observed teacher employed eight distinct non-verbal communication strategies.

Demonstrating Enthusiasm

Teachers' enthusiasm, expressed through tone, facial expressions, and animated gestures, signals investment and passion. Patrick et al. (2000) found that teacher enthusiasm is positively correlated with student interest and task engagement. Enthusiasm acts as an emotional contagion, inspiring reciprocal energy from learners.

Using Gestures

Gestures function as embodied explanations that supplement verbal instruction. Levy and McNeill (1992) identified gestures—iconic, metaphoric, deictic—as central to conveying abstract concepts. In language learning, gestures facilitate comprehension, particularly when teaching new vocabulary or complex instructions.

Vocal Variety

Effective teachers modulate their vocal delivery to maintain attention and signal the importance of specific content. Monotony can hinder cognitive engagement, while

variation in pitch and pace can emphasize meaning and signal transitions. This aligns with Rosenshine's (2012) principles of instruction, which stress the importance of clarity and engagement in teacher talk.

Smiling

Smiling communicates warmth and approachability. According to Liu (2021), non-verbal immediacy behaviors like smiling reduce psychological distance, promoting openness and trust in the classroom. This is especially crucial in language classrooms, where anxiety may inhibit participation.

Formal Dress

Professional appearance communicates authority, respect for the learning environment, and role modeling. As Kramer (2011) argues, teacher appearance is a non-verbal form of communication that influences students' perceptions of teacher credibility and discipline expectations.

Eye Contact

Maintaining eye contact is essential for managing classroom dynamics, fostering interaction, and expressing attentiveness. Eye contact encourages student accountability and signals that the teacher is attuned to individual and collective behaviors. It also supports engagement, as noted in the work of Argyle and Dean (1965).

Movement Around the Classroom

Teacher mobility enhances proximity, signals inclusivity, and aids in classroom management. Moving around allows the teacher to monitor engagement, offer support, and break down hierarchical barriers. This echoes Berliner (2014) emphasis on physical presence as a classroom management technique.

Observing Students While Teaching

Consistent visual scanning ensures that students are attentive, engaged, and not confused. Observing students while teaching is a form of formative assessment, allowing the teacher to adjust instruction based on non-verbal cues of understanding or confusion.

Synthesis of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

The integration of verbal and non-verbal communication by the teacher contributes holistically to student engagement, motivation, and language acquisition. As Schiefele (2015) emphasizes, interpersonal communication is central to EFL instruction, shaping not only what students learn but how they feel about learning. Students reported that the teacher's communication strategies made them feel understood, valued, and encouraged, which aligns with Dörnyei's (2001) assertion that motivation is among the most crucial factors in second language acquisition. The evidence from this study underscores that effective communication—both verbal and non-verbal—enhances the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning. It reinforces the notion that teaching is inherently relational and that communicative competence is a foundational skill for EFL educators. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts yielded several salient themes, indicating that the teacher's communication strategies significantly influenced students' emotional and motivational responses to the learning process. First, Perceived Emotional Support

and Sense of Care. Students consistently reported that the teacher's verbal behaviors—such as greeting students warmly, using personal and respectful address (e.g., "*nak*"), and calling students by their names—conveyed a strong sense of care and recognition. These behaviors were interpreted as indicative of the teacher's attentiveness and emotional investment in the learners' well-being, fostering a positive relational climate in the classroom. Second, Increased Motivation and Active Engagement. Humorous expressions, use of inclusive language (e.g., "*we*", "*us*"), and dynamic vocal delivery were frequently cited as enhancing the classroom atmosphere and increasing students' intrinsic motivation. Students noted that these strategies made the learning environment less formal and more collaborative, encouraging active participation and reducing language anxiety.

Third, Enhanced Feelings of Value and Respect. Students emphasized that communicative behaviors such as providing individualized feedback, maintaining regular eye contact, and acknowledging each student's presence contributed to a heightened sense of respect and self-worth. These actions were seen as affirmations of their importance as learners, which in turn reinforced their commitment to academic effort and engagement. Fourth, Improved Comprehension and Learning Outcomes. Several students highlighted the teacher's use of code-switching between Indonesian and English as beneficial for comprehension. This strategy, when combined with visual support (e.g., PowerPoint slides) and expressive gestures, facilitated clearer understanding of linguistic concepts and instructional content. Students also appreciated the teacher's willingness to repeat explanations in a calm and varied tone, which was particularly helpful in demystifying complex material. Fifth, Teacher's Intentionality in Communication Practices. From the teacher's perspective, the use of both verbal and non-verbal strategies was a deliberate pedagogical choice aimed at enhancing classroom rapport and promoting learner-centred interaction. The teacher indicated that non-verbal techniques, such as animated facial expressions, purposeful movement across the classroom, and vocal variety, were employed to sustain learners' attention and foster an inclusive and stimulating environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and analysis of the present study, it can be concluded that the teacher employed a comprehensive range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to foster effective interaction and support language learning in the EFL classroom. Specifically, thirteen forms of verbal communication were identified, including greeting students at the beginning of the lesson, initiating and concluding with prayer, taking attendance, offering study-related encouragement, addressing students by name, providing constructive feedback, integrating humor, employing inclusive pronouns such as "*we*" and "*us*," code-switching between Indonesian and English, posing questions, expressing gratitude, using the affectionate term "*nak*", and utilizing slideshow presentations as part of instruction. Interview findings with students further revealed that these verbal and non-verbal communicative behaviours had a significant positive impact on their motivation and emotional engagement in learning English. Students reported experiencing a heightened sense of care, improved comprehension, increased comfort and enjoyment, deeper interest in the learning process, and feelings of being appreciated and respected.

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