




Teachers' Perception of Their Nonverbal Behaviors in the Classroom: A Grounded Theory

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Introduction

Communication can be defined as a process that influences another individual through various symbols (as cited in Gulec & Temel, 2015). Communication is divided into two categories: verbal and non-verbal. Non-verbal communication is the unwritten form of communication used in every face-to-face encounter between humans (Chaudhry, 2012). According to research by Kožić et al. (2013), non-verbal communication includes eye contact, gestures, movements, touch, facial expressions, tone, and volume of voice, which develop automatically at birth and in early childhood. Until the 1970s, most studies focused on verbal communication, but thanks to pioneering researchers like Hall (1979) and Argyle (1971), non-verbal communication has gained more attention. Communication in education holds a significant place, as it does in all aspects of life. Education is also a communicative activity, and its effectiveness largely depends on the quality of communication between educators and students (Gulec & Temel, 2015). Non-verbal aspects of teaching account for 75% to 90% of the

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messages conveyed, yet they are often overlooked. In fact, in communication, words hold less importance compared to tone of voice, facial cues such as eye contact, gestures, and the teacher's body posture. Non-verbal cues literally give meaning to the words used in speech; in other words, the medium becomes the message. Effective teachers use these cues skillfully (Sprinthall, 1994).

Given the importance of non-verbal communication cues, a teacher aiming for effective communication with their students must be aware of their students' body language, such as gestures, glances, facial expressions, and posture. An effective teacher can enhance their communication with students by establishing a connection through body language, helping students feel more secure and supported (Pan, 2014). In this regard, teachers' opinions on the impact of non-verbal factors on effective communication are crucial. Acquiring effective skills in impactful communication and recognizing the importance of these factors is essential for educators. Communication skills are one of the primary professional criteria for effective teaching. Moreover, individuals use communication to express, share, and evaluate their ideas (Tutar, 2003). This research explores teachers' beliefs about their non-verbal behavior in the classroom. How familiar are teachers with non-verbal behaviors? How aware are they of the importance of these behaviors? What is their perception of the consequences of their non-verbal behavior in the classroom? Teachers' beliefs about their non-verbal behavior in the classroom are currently unknown and will be revealed through in-depth interviews.

Methodology

This research aims to explain the consequences of teachers' non-verbal communication using a qualitative approach and grounded theory methodology. The study's population includes all female high school teachers in Mashhad who were employed during the 2023-2024 academic year. A purposive sampling method (theoretical sampling) was used based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. The opinions of interviewees in this study reached saturation after 13 interviews, and the process was completed with the 15th interview. In this study, after conducting two interviews, the researcher decided to approach teachers with more than ten years of experience and degrees at the master's and doctoral levels, as the subject was specialized and, according to the teachers themselves, they had no specific information about non-verbal communication and had not considered it. This was to reach significant concepts. However, after interviewing the teachers, due to the majority's lack of awareness regarding non-verbal communication, the researcher did not obtain many concepts. To compile a grounded theory, in addition to interviewing teachers, the researcher analyzed previous literature on the consequences of non-verbal communication for concept analysis and category development. Using the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (2015), a

comprehensive model was developed as a paradigmatic model, and the data were analyzed at three levels: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Findings

The researcher organized the initial categories of information regarding the phenomenon under study by segmenting the data. By analyzing and coding the interviews and reviewing previous research, a total of 252 open codes were obtained as initial conceptual propositions. In the next phase, axial coding, categories were related to subcategories and linked at the level of characteristics and dimensions. The data coding process, data reduction, and development of the paradigmatic model were carried out. This study aims to explore teachers' beliefs about their non-verbal behavior in the classroom.

The findings showed that the influencing factors include non-verbal communication patterns, forms, functions, the degree of intervention, teachers' lack of awareness, and how teachers intervene in students' speech. The strategy emphasizes the necessity of training courses on non-verbal behaviors. The consequences of non-verbal communication are considered from both teachers' and students' perspectives. Intervening conditions, teacher personality profiling, student audience analysis, and contextual factors highlight the importance of the discussion, the two dimensions of non-verbal behaviors, and methods for teaching these behaviors.

Conclusion

The findings of the research indicated that the influential factors include non-verbal communication patterns, forms of non-verbal communication, the functions of non-verbal communication, the degree of intervention in non-verbal communication, teachers' lack of awareness, and the way teachers intervene in students' speech. Additionally, the proposed strategy emphasizes the necessity of conducting training courses on non-verbal behaviors. The implications of non-verbal communication are considered from two perspectives: both teachers and students. The conditions affecting intervention, teacher personality profiling, student audience analysis, and contextual factors highlight the importance of discussing both non-verbal behaviors and methods for teaching these behaviors. The results of this research could be useful in developing tools, identifying the consequences of non-verbal behaviors, and creating intervention protocols aimed at improving these outcomes.

It is also suggested that,

- Based on the results of this study, a training protocol be developed to increase teachers' information and awareness.

- Additionally, future studies should focus on effectiveness of implementing a nonverbal communication training protocol for teachers and its role in improving interaction.

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