



Exploring the Effects of Teacher's Nonverbal Communication on EFL Students' Academic Motivation

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Received: 2025-07-07 Accepted: 2025-12-14

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.7428

Abstract

Teacher's nonverbal communication significantly effects students' learning experiences, particularly in EFL Islamic classroom context where language and motivation are closely linked. This study examined the effects of teachers' nonverbal communication on students' academic motivation using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 60 students through questionnaires measuring seven aspects of nonverbal communication namely proxemics, haptics, kinesics, chronemics, oculusics, physical environment, and paralanguage and three aspects of motivation that is, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Qualitative data were obtained through classroom observations and interviews with ten selected students. Findings revealed that kinesics and proxemics received the highest ratings, indicating active use of gestures and classroom movement to engage students. Haptics and paralanguage scored lowest, suggesting limited use due to cultural norms. Correlation and regression analyses indicated a strong positive relationship between teachers' nonverbal communication and student motivation. Observations confirmed that smiling, nodding, using hand gestures, and approaching students created a positive and low-anxiety learning atmosphere. Interviews supported these results, with students expressing greater confidence, comfort, and willingness to participate when teachers-maintained eye contact, used expressive gestures, and adjusted their proximity. This study highlights the importance of nonverbal behaviors in fostering a motivating EFL learning environment. Teachers' awareness and intentional use of such cues can strengthen engagement and emotional connection, even in culturally specific settings.

Keywords: *nonverbal communication, academic motivation, self-determination theory*

Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, teachers' ability to communicate effectively is not limited to what is spoken, but also to how messages are conveyed nonverbally. Communication is a multidimensional process, and in language learning settings, the nonverbal aspects of interaction often carry substantial weight in shaping the educational experience. Nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in delivering meaning, expressing emotion, and fostering interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. This multidimensionality becomes especially important in EFL classrooms, where language proficiency gaps can hinder straightforward verbal communication, making nonverbal signals an indispensable part of effective teaching and learning.

As Burgoon, Manusov, and Guerrero (2021) outlines, nonverbal communication includes multiple channels such as kinesics (gestures and facial expressions), proxemics (use of space), haptics (touch), chronemics (use of time), oculosics (eye contact), paralanguage (tone and pitch), and physical appearance. Each of these channels contributes uniquely to the communication process, and together they create a complex system of signs that students interpret continuously during classroom interaction. For example, kinesics encompasses not only simple gestures but also subtleties in facial expressions that convey emotions like encouragement, frustration, or enthusiasm. Proxemics refers to how physical distance can signal authority or approachability, while haptics involves the use of touch, which can range from reassuring pats on the shoulder to signaling attention or disapproval, depending on cultural norms.

Lapakko (2015) discusses the widespread claim that communication is 93% nonverbal, originally derived from Albert Mehrabian's research, and cautions against misinterpretations of this figure. While the exact percentages have been debated and are often misunderstood outside their original context specifically emotional and attitudinal communication the core idea remains clear: nonverbal communication plays a crucial and often dominant role in conveying meaning during face-to-face interactions. In the EFL classroom, teachers' facial expressions, eye movements, gestures, and tone of voice serve as powerful tools not only for delivering instruction but also for fostering a supportive learning environment. These nonverbal cues help students overcome language barriers, clarify ambiguous messages, and sustain their engagement throughout learning activities.

In addition, Bambaeroo and Shokrpour (2017) emphasize that nonverbal behaviors play a crucial role in regulating interaction, expressing emotion, and demonstrating involvement all vital factors in sustaining student motivation over time. For instance, a teacher's smile or nod can provide immediate positive feedback, reinforcing student participation and effort. Nonverbal cues also facilitate turn-taking and help manage the flow of communication, ensuring students feel heard and supported. When effectively used, these cues contribute to a dynamic classroom atmosphere that promotes sustained motivation and academic persistence.

Conversely, negative or absent nonverbal signals may lead to misunderstandings, disengagement, or feelings of alienation among students.

Some related researches have shown research has shown that nonverbal communication significantly contributes to students' perception of teacher immediacy, which in turn affects their motivation and engagement. Kaniadewi and Larasati (2025) found that nonverbal immediacy behaviors such as eye contact, smiling, varied tone of voice, and reducing physical distance can create a psychologically warm and close environment. This environment encourages active student participation and helps students feel valued and supported, which in turn fosters a sense of belongingness crucial for intrinsic motivation. This psychological closeness also helps alleviate anxiety or apprehension commonly experienced by EFL learners when facing language challenges.

Similarly, DeVito (2016) argues that nonverbal cues often carry more emotional weight than verbal expressions, helping to build rapport and trust in instructional settings. Trust and rapport are essential in the classroom as they enable open communication and create a safe space for learners to take risks, such as speaking in a foreign language despite fears of making mistakes. Nonverbal communication often communicates empathy and understanding even when verbal fluency is limited, thereby supporting emotional connection and motivation. In EFL classrooms where language barriers may pose communication challenges, nonverbal cues often serve as critical scaffolding for understanding and emotional connection, helping bridge gaps that verbal communication alone cannot fill.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, Ryan and L.Deci (2019) emphasize that academic motivation is influenced by students' experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three basic psychological needs form the foundation for intrinsic motivation and effective learning. When teachers use nonverbal cues that express warmth, attentiveness, and respect, students are more likely to feel connected (relatedness), capable (competence), and supported in their choices (autonomy). For instance, a simple nod, smile, or appropriate proximity can reassure students that their efforts are noticed and valued, reinforcing their willingness to engage with the learning process. These subtle behaviors affirm students' presence and contributions, fostering an environment where learners are motivated to take initiative and persevere in language acquisition.

Nevertheless, nonverbal communication in EFL classrooms may be influenced by sociocultural and religious norms, especially in Islamic educational settings. In classrooms where teachers wear the niqab, for example, facial expressions are limited, which may alter students' perceptions of emotional warmth and immediacy. Hess (2023) adds that classroom atmosphere and teacher appearance also function as nonverbal cues that shape students' emotional experience. These limitations pose particular challenges because facial expressions are among the most immediate and powerful nonverbal signals in social interactions. When obscured, teachers must rely more heavily on other channels such as vocal

tone, gesture, and proxemics to communicate effectively.

In some settings, cultural expectations related to gender and modesty may restrict physical proximity and eye contact, particularly in mixed-gender classrooms. Such constraints affect how teachers and students engage nonverbally, which in turn impacts motivational dynamics. For instance, reduced eye contact or physical distance may be interpreted differently across cultures, potentially signaling respect in some contexts but distance or disengagement in others. These unique cultural variables require teachers to adapt their nonverbal communication carefully to maintain supportive and motivating classroom interactions. Understanding these nuances is critical for effective teaching in culturally and religiously diverse EFL environments.

Despite the well-established importance of nonverbal communication, there remains limited empirical research that investigates its specific impact on students' academic motivation in culturally specific EFL contexts, such as Islamic junior high schools in Indonesia. Most existing studies on teacher communication and motivation have been conducted in Western or secular educational settings, with limited focus on how cultural and religious factors mediate communication practices. This gap in research underscores the need for studies that explore how nonverbal communication functions within particular socio-religious frameworks and how it affects learners' motivational experiences.

This study addresses those above gaps by examining the extent to which teachers' nonverbal communication influences students' motivation to learn English. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, this study explores not only statistical patterns but also the lived experiences of students in interpreting and reacting to their teachers' nonverbal behaviors. Such an approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complex interaction between communication practices and motivational outcomes in EFL classrooms situated within unique cultural contexts. It further contributes to the development of pedagogical strategies that are culturally sensitive and effective in enhancing student motivation.

Method

1. Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design by Creswell (2021) to investigate the extent to which teachers' nonverbal communication influences students' academic motivation in the EFL classroom. The research was conducted at a junior high school in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection phases. The design was selected to gain a comprehensive understanding by initially obtaining general patterns from quantitative data and then explaining the findings in more depth through qualitative insights.

2. Research Subject

The participants in the quantitative phase consisted of 60 students from grades 8, selected through total sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. These students were enrolled in two types of classes: one class consisting entirely of female students (all-female class) and another mixed-gender class consisting of both male and female students. In the mixed-gender class, the classroom was divided by a partition wall that physically separated male and female students; however, the teacher remained visible and accessible to all students despite the separation. This distinction is important as it may influence the dynamics of teacher-student communication.

The qualitative phase involved ten students chosen based on the results of the questionnaire, representing high, moderate, and low perception levels of teacher's nonverbal communication. Additionally, classroom observation was conducted to support the data triangulation used.

3. Research Instruments

The instruments used were a questionnaire, an interview guideline, and an observation checklist. The questionnaire was designed to measure the effects of teachers' nonverbal communication on students' academic motivation, adapted from Burgoon et al. (2021) for nonverbal communication (including proxemics, haptics, kinesics, oculosics, chronemics, paralanguage, and classroom environment), and from Ryan and L.Deci (2019) Self-Determination Theory (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) for academic motivation. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were ensured through expert judgment and pilot testing (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.87).

The interview guideline consisted of semi-structured questions designed to explore students' personal experiences and perceptions regarding the effect of teachers' nonverbal communication on their motivation in class. An observation checklist was used to systematically record teacher's nonverbal behaviors during five classroom meetings, focusing on the same dimensions measured in the questionnaire.

4. Data Collection Techniques

The study began with the distribution of the questionnaire to all participants. The responses were then analyzed to determine the overall tendency and correlation between the variables. Based on the results, selected students were invited for semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed. Simultaneously, classroom observations were conducted to capture real-time teacher-student interactions and validate the data obtained through other instruments.

5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple regression analysis to identify the influence of nonverbal communication on academic motivation. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke analysis in six-step model: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Triangulation was applied by integrating data from questionnaires, interviews, and observations to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings.

Results

This section presents the findings on how teacher's nonverbal communication including proxemics, haptics, oculusics, chronemics, kinesics, paralanguage, and physical environment effects on EFL students' academic motivation gained through questionnaire, interview, and classroom observation and described as in the following lines.

1. Questionnaire Analysis

The questionnaire served as the main quantitative tool to determine how strongly teacher's nonverbal communication affects students' academic motivation as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistic

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Proxemic	60	1	4	3,20	,898
Haptic	60	1	4	1,52	,651
Oculusic	60	2	4	2,77	,722
Chronemic	60	1	4	2,33	,542
Kinesics	60	2	4	3,23	,533
Facial Expression	60	2	3	2,95	,220
Paralanguage	60	1	3	1,42	,645
Environment	60	1	4	2,77	,927
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Based on the descriptive statistic, kinesics ($M = 3.23$) and proxemic ($M = 3.20$) received the highest mean scores among nonverbal indicators, suggesting that students perceived their teacher as actively using body movements and physical proximity to engage with them during learning. Facial expressions were also rated relatively high ($M = 2.95$), indicating that the teacher often used expressions to communicate emotions and reactions. On the other hand, haptic ($M = 1.52$) and paralanguage ($M = 1.42$) received the lowest scores, suggesting that the teacher

rarely used physical touch or vocal variety (e.g., tone, pitch, or volume) as part of their teaching. Chronemic ($M = 2.33$) and environment ($M = 2.77$) were rated moderately, indicating a perception of limited use of time management and learning space adjustments to support motivation.

The next step was to determine whether there was a statistical relationship between the overall use of these nonverbal behaviors and students' academic motivation. To address this, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted, aiming to measure the strength and direction of the association between the two variables as seen on the following table.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Result

		Teacher's Nonverbal Communication	Students' Academic Motivation
Teacher's Nonverbal Communication	Pearson Correlation	1	,671**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<,001
	N	60	60
Students' Academic Motivation	Pearson Correlation	,671**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis shows a strong positive relationship between teacher's nonverbal communication and students' academic motivation ($r = .671$, $p < .001$). This indicates that the more effectively teachers use nonverbal cues such as gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions, the more motivated students tend to be in learning English.

To gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which each nonverbal communication indicator contributes to students' academic motivation, a multiple regression analysis was conducted that can be seen on the following table. This analysis aims to identify the most influential verbal behaviors and to examine how the combination of these variables predicts students' motivation in learning English.

Table 3. Teacher's Nonverbal Regression

Coefficients ^a		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardiz ed Coefficient s	T	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	18.380	1.904		9.656	.000
	Teacher's Nonverbal Communication	.641	.093	.671	6.888	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Students' Academic Motivation

The regression analysis reveals a significant positive effect of teacher's nonverbal communication on students' academic motivation in the EFL classroom, with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.671 and a p-value below 0.001. This finding implies that improvements in the quality of a teacher's nonverbal behavior are associated with higher levels of student motivation. Specifically, the unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.641$) indicates that for every one-point increase in the nonverbal communication score, students' motivation rises by approximately 0.641 points. This suggests that teacher's nonverbal communication serves as a powerful predictor of students' academic engagement and emotional investment in learning English.

2. Classroom Observation

The classroom observations, conducted over five separate meetings, revealed a consistent yet evolving pattern in the teacher's use of nonverbal communication strategies and their observable effects on classroom dynamics. During the first meeting, the teacher demonstrated an effective use of proxemics by moving closer to students while they were engaged in group work, thereby creating a sense of presence and accessibility. Eye contact (oculesics) was also maintained when responding to students, which appeared to foster attentiveness and acknowledgement. However, other nonverbal elements such as kinesics, paralanguage, and haptics were either minimal or absent; body movements lacked expressiveness, vocal delivery remained monotonous at times, and light physical touch was not observed at all. Furthermore, chronemics specifically in terms of transitioning between lesson segments was not optimally managed, as some activities felt rushed, and the physical environment of the classroom remained standard without any motivational adjustments.

In the second meeting, a broader range of nonverbal communication behaviors became evident. The teacher made purposeful movements between students' desks, reinforcing a sense of approachability and attentiveness. Eye contact was effectively used during questioning, which appeared to stimulate active participation. Time management improved, with a balanced allocation between presentation and discussion phases. Gestures were used to clarify abstract concepts, such as contrasting "big" and "small," enabling students to visualize meaning more concretely. Vocal modulation (paralanguage) was also present, with deliberate emphasis placed on key points. Nevertheless, haptic behavior was still absent, and the classroom environment was unchanged from the previous session.

The third meeting demonstrated several dynamic and student-centered applications of nonverbal communication. Proxemics was utilized not only through movement but also by the teacher sitting next to students during individual guidance, creating a stronger sense of interpersonal closeness. Eye contact was sustained while students were speaking, reinforcing attentiveness and mutual respect. Chronemics was well-managed, particularly during group discussions, allowing students sufficient time to articulate their ideas. Kinesics became more

pronounced, with the teacher using demonstrative gestures to act out vocabulary such as “running” and “eating,” which appeared to enhance comprehension and retention. However, haptics remained absent, the physical environment was unchanged, and paralinguistic was relatively weak due to occasional lack of vocal clarity.

During the fourth meeting, the teacher maintained an active physical presence by moving around the classroom and approaching each group during assignments. Eye contact remained consistent and purposeful, signaling active listening. Lesson timing was effectively managed, with all planned activities completed within the allocated time. Gestures continued to be used to illustrate concepts, such as comparing “tall” and “short,” which aided students’ grasp of meaning. Paralinguistic was more appropriately applied, with a firm yet gentle tone of voice during instruction, contributing to both authority and approachability. As in previous sessions, haptics was absent, and the classroom layout and decor remained static.

In the fifth and final observation, the teacher continued to employ nonverbal strategies effectively, with a particular focus on re-engaging less responsive students by physically approaching them and offering warm verbal greetings accompanied by eye contact. This appeared to create a positive and welcoming atmosphere from the outset. Time management was once again handled well, with lesson stages proceeding smoothly. Kinesics was applied through lively actions such as “jumping” and “clapping” to reinforce vocabulary comprehension. Despite these strengths, haptics was still unused, vocal expressiveness was inconsistent, and the physical classroom environment remained unaltered.

Overall, the observational data strongly supported the questionnaire findings, particularly with regard to the indicators that received the highest mean scores kinesics, proxemics, and oculosics. These behaviors were consistently observed in practice and appeared to enhance student engagement, as evidenced by visible signs of attentiveness such as nodding, leaning forward, and volunteering answers. In contrast, haptics, paralinguistic variation, and classroom environment modifications were rarely employed, indicating untapped potential in these areas for further motivating students. The consistent presence of certain nonverbal behaviors suggests that they function as a core part of the teacher’s instructional repertoire, while the underutilization of others reflects both cultural constraints and personal teaching style.

3. Interview

The interview data revealed a range of student perceptions regarding their teacher’s nonverbal communication and how it influenced their learning experience in the EFL classroom. Several students expressed positive feelings when describing specific nonverbal actions performed by the teacher. One student shared that a simple smile from the teacher during class activities made them feel valued and motivated to continue participating, as stated in the following extract:

Extract 1 (Student 4, 31/05/2025)

"Kalau Ibu guru tersenyum saat melihat saya jawab, saya merasa dihargai dan jadi semangat buat nyoba lagi." (If the teacher smiles when she sees me answer, I feel grateful and am motivated to try again).

This response indicates that the student associated the teacher's smile with appreciation and a sense of encouragement, which helped them to keep trying despite challenges they might face during the lesson. Another student, who was in a classroom setting where the teacher wore a niqab, noted that although they could not see the teacher's full facial expression, the eyes conveyed warmth and friendliness that made the learning atmosphere comfortable. The student described this experience in the following extract:

Extract 2 (Student 3, 31/05/2025)

"Karena gurunya memakai niqab, saya tidak bisa melihat wajahnya secara penuh. Namun matanya selalu tersenyum, dan itu membuat saya merasa nyaman. Rasanya pelajarannya menyenangkan, tidak menegangkan." (Because the teacher wears a niqab, I can't see her full face. But her eyes are always smiling, and that makes me feel comfortable. It feels like the lesson is enjoyable, not stressful).

This shows that even with visual limitations, students were able to perceive emotional signals through the teacher's eyes, which helped create a supportive classroom environment. Positive comments also emerged regarding the teacher's use of gestures to aid understanding, particularly in situations where noise in the classroom made it difficult to hear verbal explanations as seen in the following extract:

Extract 3 (Student 4, 31/05/2025)

"Kadang saya tidak mengerti kata-katanya karena teman saya sangat berisik, tetapi gerakannya membantu saya memahami artinya." (Sometimes I don't understand the words because my friends are really noisy, but her gestures help me get the meaning).

The student indicated that these physical movements provided additional clues that made it easier to follow the lesson content, especially when verbal communication was interrupted by distractions. However, not all perceptions were positive. Some students reported experiences where nonverbal behaviors from the teacher had an opposite effect, making them feel hesitant to engage in classroom activities. One student explained that when the teacher showed an angry expression or remained silent after a mistake, they felt embarrassed and less willing to participate. This is reflected in the following extract:

Extract 4 (Student 2, 31/05/2025)

"Kalau Ibu diam saja atau mukanya kelihatan marah waktu saya salah, saya jadi malu dan takut ngomong lagi." (If my teacher keeps quiet or looks angry when I make a mistake, I feel embarrassed and afraid to speak again).

This reaction suggested that certain nonverbal signals could discourage interaction and reduce the student's confidence in contributing to discussions. The tone and variation in the teacher's voice were also noted by some students as affecting their engagement. A monotonous or overly soft voice was described as making lessons less stimulating and harder to follow. This is reflected in the following extract:

Extract 5 (Student 2, 31/05/2025)

"Kalau suaranya pelan dan datar, saya malah jadi ngantuk. Rasanya nggak semangat belajarnya." (If the sound is soft and flat, I actually get sleepy. I don't feel motivated to study).

This comment reflected the perception that a lack of vocal expressiveness made it more difficult to stay attentive during lessons, which in turn reduced their desire to engage with the learning process.

From these interviews, it became evident that students' experiences of their teacher's nonverbal communication varied significantly. While many valued behaviors such as smiling, expressive eye contact, and supportive gestures for creating a more comfortable and engaging environment, others found that negative facial expressions, silence after mistakes, and a flat tone of voice could make participation more difficult. These accounts highlight the diversity of students' perspectives and the direct ways in which they connected the teacher's nonverbal behavior to their own comfort, attention, and willingness to learn.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that teacher's nonverbal communication exerts a substantial and multidimensional effect on EFL students' academic motivation. Across data sources questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews it was consistently demonstrated that nonverbal cues, whether consciously employed or unconsciously expressed, function as a central mechanism in shaping students' affective engagement, regulating classroom interaction, and sustaining motivation to learn English. This aligns with Lapakko (2015) foundational premise that a considerable proportion of meaning in human interaction is transmitted through nonverbal channels, with facial expressions, gestures, and vocal tone often carrying more weight than spoken words in conveying attitudes and emotions.

From the questionnaire results, it became evident that students responded most positively to teacher's kinesics and proxemics. This means that body movement, expressive gestures, and physical proximity were consistently interpreted as motivational triggers that increased students' sense of being engaged and supported. Bambaeroo and Shokrpour (2017) emphasized that kinesic behaviors including hand movements, postural shifts, and facial expressions serve to regulate the flow of communication, reinforce verbal messages, and signal attentiveness. Similarly, Burgoon et al. (2021) argue that such immediacy behaviors reduce both

psychological and physical distance between communicators, thereby enhancing relational closeness. In this study, students noted that when their teacher moved closer during group activities or leaned in while giving feedback, it signaled genuine interest and created a feeling of being acknowledged, which in turn supported their sense of relatedness Ryan and L.Deci (2019).

The classroom observations substantiated these survey findings by revealing a consistent pattern: lessons characterized by varied intonation, strategic use of space, warm facial expressions, and illustrative gestures generated higher levels of visible student attentiveness. In these instances, learners nodded in agreement, sought clarification through follow-up questions, and displayed greater willingness to participate. This mirrors Kaniadewi and Shafira Larasati (2025) teacher immediacy, which posits that physical and psychological closeness fostered by nonverbal behaviors enhances students' affective learning and motivation. In contrast, lessons where paralinguistic was limited such as monotone speech or minimal vocal variation were associated with reduced student responsiveness, validating DeVito (2016) assertion that vocalics are critical to maintaining attention and emotional connection in instructional contexts.

A distinctive dimension of this study emerged in the comparison between all-female classes and mixed-gender classes, particularly in relation to the sociocultural factor of niqab usage. In all-female settings, the teacher removed her niqab, enabling full visibility of facial expressions, clearer vocal projection, and freer physical proximity to students. These conditions amplified immediacy cues such as smiling, eyebrow movement, and open postures, which students described as making lessons "more enjoyable," "less tense," and "emotionally engaging." Burgoon, et.al (2021) and Brink Andersen (2020) note that facial visibility and vocal clarity significantly enhance relational immediacy, which can, in turn, elevate motivation. By contrast, in mixed-gender classes, the teacher wore a niqab, which partially concealed facial expressions, softened vocal projection, and restricted close physical interactions, particularly with male students. This finding aligns with Nur, Dwi, and Maria (2023) observations that sociocultural and religious norms shape the range and intensity of nonverbal behaviors permissible in specific contexts, sometimes constraining immediacy even when the pedagogical benefits are understood.

Interview data provided deeper insight into how students perceived these nonverbal variations. Positive perceptions were most frequently associated with smiling, warm eye contact, and purposeful gestures. One student described feeling "appreciated and encouraged to try again" when the teacher smiled after an answer, suggesting that such facial expressions functioned as silent praise. Even in niqab-wearing contexts, students noted that "smiling eyes" could convey warmth and approachability, reduce anxiety and create a more relaxed classroom atmosphere. This observation resonates with Gunnery and Ruben (2015) concept of the "Duchenne smile," in which genuine eye involvement can communicate authenticity and care even without full facial exposure.

Conversely, negative perceptions were tied to cold facial expressions, prolonged silence after mistakes, and flat vocal delivery. Students described such behaviors as discouraging, intimidating, or “making the class feel boring,” which inhibited their willingness to participate. This reflects Kaniadewi and Shafira Larasati (2025) assertion that the absence or reduction of immediacy cues can diminish students’ affective learning and lower their intrinsic motivation. The SDT framework Ryan and L.Deci (2019) further explains that such conditions undermine the fulfillment of competence and relatedness needs, which are essential for sustained academic motivation.

The classroom observation data corroborated these interview insights. Across five observed lessons, proxemics, oculosics, chronemics, and kinesics were used most consistently and effectively. The teacher frequently moved between desks, maintained eye contact when students spoke, allocated time efficiently for activities, and used gestures to illustrate vocabulary and concepts. However, haptics was notably absent throughout the mixed-gender sessions. Paralanguage was inconsistently applied; in some lessons, vocal variation was effective, but in others, a monotone delivery reduced engagement. The physical classroom environment remained static across sessions, suggesting that environmental modifications as a motivational strategy were underutilized, despite research by Gao et al. (2022) indicating that physical space design can influence student engagement and learning outcomes.

When triangulated, the quantitative and qualitative findings paint a cohesive picture: teacher’s nonverbal communication in the EFL classroom is not an accessory to verbal instruction but a vital pedagogical instrument. Effective use of body language, eye contact, spatial movement, vocal modulation, and environmental cues fosters an emotionally safe and intellectually stimulating learning environment. These behaviors satisfy the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness outlined in SDT, which, in turn, sustains students’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learn. However, the expression of these nonverbal cues is inevitably mediated by sociocultural norms, particularly in contexts involving gender-based interaction boundaries and religious dress such as the niqab.

This study, therefore suggests that teacher professional development in EFL contexts should incorporate explicit training on culturally responsive nonverbal communication strategies. Teachers should learn how to adapt immediacy behaviors within cultural boundaries maximizing available channels such as expressive eye contact, purposeful gestures, and dynamic vocal delivery to preserve motivational impact. Additionally, fostering awareness of environmental and spatial cues, as well as the strategic use of time and proximity, can further enhance classroom motivation even when certain forms of immediacy, like touch or facial visibility, are limited.

In sum, this study underscores that in EFL classroom particularly in Islamic context, nonverbal communication is both a pedagogical necessity and a cultural negotiation. When effectively adapted, it can bridge emotional gaps, overcome

communication barriers, and significantly enhance students' motivation to engage in language learning.

Conclusion

This study concludes that teacher's nonverbal communication has a significant effect on EFL students' academic motivation. The findings of questionnaire, classroom observations, and student interviews consistently showed that gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice, physical proximity, classroom atmosphere, and physical appearance play an important role in shaping students' emotional engagement and willingness to participate in learning. Positive nonverbal cues such as smiling, warm eye contact, expressive gestures, and dynamic voice delivery were perceived by students as motivating and supportive, fostering a comfortable and engaging classroom climate.

The study also revealed differences in nonverbal communication between all-female and mixed-gender classes. In all-female classes, the removal of the niqab allowed clearer facial expressions, better vocal projection, and closer proximity, which enhanced students' sense of connection and comfort. In mixed-gender classes, the use of the niqab, softer voice, limited facial visibility, and greater physical distance especially from male students created a more reserved classroom atmosphere.

Overall, effective and culturally responsive nonverbal communication strengthens teacher-student relationships, supports students' confidence, and sustains their motivation to learn English. Teacher's awareness and adaptation of nonverbal strategies to suit different classroom contexts are essential for fostering both emotional and academic engagement.

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