

The Impact of Eye-contact between Teacher and Student on L2 Learning

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Abstract

Effective communication skills, especially in multilingual classrooms, are really important to teachers in classroom management and interaction with the class. It is well known that speech is only one part of communication, yet teachers often forget or underestimate the importance of non-verbal communication in their own and their students' performance. Teachers can use numerous strategies to manage their classroom and offer students the opportunity to build their knowledge and also to prevent misbehavior in classroom. Students are more likely to be emotionally and intellectually invested in the classes in which they have positive relationships with their teachers. Therefore, teachers who build positive relationships by eye contact with their students may enjoy the following benefits. One aspect of non-verbal communication is the use of eyes to convey messages. The eyes are powerful for both the teacher and the learner in language learning. This study examines teachers' perceptions of their communicative strengths and weaknesses in using eye-contact, as one aspect of non-verbal communication, and the impact of that on language learning. The result obtained in this study may have pedagogical implications for developing language learning that fit into the language educational curriculum adequately.

Keywords: eye-contact, non-verbal communication, perception

INTRODUCTION

Communication skills can be defined as the transmission of a message that involves the shared understanding between the context in which the communication takes place (Saunders and Mills, 1999). To teachers in classroom management effective communication is really important. It is clear that speech is only one part of communication. In the classroom another part of communication is non-verbal and one aspect of non-verbal communication is the use of the eyes to convey messages or eye-contact. Meanwhile, the business world has accepted eye contact as an important component of achieving success in giving presentations and improving rapport between representative and client. Both teachers and learners can use eyes as a powerful tool for

language learning. Communication takes place through channels. Within the teaching profession, communication skills are applied in the teachers' classroom management, pedagogy and interaction with the students. Some of these channels beside verbal connection (speech) are non-verbal factors. Although this study tries to investigate the impact of eye-contact between teacher and students as a non-verbal factor, but in some paragraphs speaks about motivation and emotion as two other non-verbal communication factors in classroom.

Newmann, Marks and Gamoran propose that students need to be given opportunities to use their minds well, which, in turn, requires standards for intellectual quality (1996). What occurs in the language classrooms must be extended beyond the walls of the classroom so that a link is created between what is learned in the classrooms with what occurs outside of the classrooms (Hussin, Maarof, and D'Cruz, 2001).

Nonverbal relations between teacher and students in the classroom can extend language communication and as a result influence language learning. The successful teacher blends both verbal and nonverbal communication skills in establishing good rapport with students and this has a direct correlation to student achievement. Nonverbal communication has been defined as communication without words. It includes apparent behaviors such as facial expressions, eyes, touching, and tone of voice, as well as less obvious messages such as dress, posture and spatial distance between two or more people. Some of these non-verbal skills are as follow:

Motivation

Always, in every classroom motivation in language-learning plays a vital role. It produces effective self-confidence in second-language communicators. Teachers need to find creative ways to teach the language and increase the student's motivation to learn the language and to eventually appreciate the language (Hussin, Maarof, and D'Cruz, 2001). It also successfully creates learners who continuously engage themselves in learning even after they complete a targeted goal. According to Hussin, Maarof, and D'Cruz, positive self-concept, high self-esteem, positive attitude, clear understanding of the goals for language learning, continuous active participation in the language learning process, the relevance of conductive environment that could contribute to the success of language learning (2001). Lucas (2010) notes that students are intrinsically motivated to learn speaking and reading skills and that they are intrinsically motivated via knowledge and accomplishment.

Emotion

Our memory can retain much better information that is associated with strong emotions. Associating the sound of a word with emotion could be more effective than just reading the word on a dictionary. A teacher who truly understands the importance of emotion in the classroom, and who believes that all students can learn, can offer opportunities for success to all students (Reid, 1999, p. 305).

Students who experience heightened emotional interest are pulled toward a subject because they are energized, excited, and emotionally engaged by the material. This increase in emotional arousal heightens a student's attention, making it easier to encode more information (Dornyei, 2000). Therefore, discovering emotional factors and sense in the classroom by teacher can be highly useful to decide how to learn and teach languages. In order to develop emotional relationship with learners, teachers need to understand students who are from different backgrounds, have different interests, future goals, aims for learning, and most importantly, different emotional personalities. Therefore, teachers, in order to increase language learning in classroom, should develop a good emotional relationship with their learners (Kabilan, 2000). Gardner (2007) believes that both motivation and emotion play an important role in the formation of language patterns in learner mind.

Eye contact

By having a good relationship with students, teachers can offer to students chances to be motivated and feel engaged in the learning process. Students will be engaged actively in the learning instead of being passive learners. The students have in their mind that a positive relationship with their teachers positively impacts their interest and motivation in school which contributes to the enhancement of the learning process.

The other aspect of non-verbal communication is the use of the eyes to convey messages. For both the teacher and the learner, the eyes are a powerful tool around the teaching and learning environment. Eye contact produces a powerful, subconscious sense of connection that extends even to drawn or photographed eyes. Because it is connected with humans' earliest survival patterns. Children who could attract and maintain eye contact, and therefore increase attention, had the best chance of being fed and cared for. Today, newborns instinctively lock eyes with their caregivers. And the power of that infantile eye contact still retains its impact on the adult mind, (Hall, 1966). Teachers can use numerous strategies to manage their classroom and offer students the opportunity to build their knowledge and also to prevent misbehavior in classroom. Students are more likely to be emotionally and intellectually invested in the classes in which they have positive relationships with their teachers. Therefore, teachers who build positive relationships by eye contact with their students may enjoy the following benefits.

Sometimes, too much eye contact is instinctively felt to be rude, hostile and condescending (Chen, 2005). Also, in a business context, it may also be perceived as a deliberate intent to dominate, intimidate, belittle, or make "the other" feel at a disadvantage. Many learners are likely to find this uncomfortable and consequently avert their own eyes and lose concentration. We reduce eye contact when we are talking about something shameful or embarrassing, when we are sad or depressed, and when we are accessing internal thoughts or emotions.

But, it is not always correct in language learning. , longer eye contact is associated with trust, good feelings, and rapport all of which are important leveraging qualities (Huang,

2006). Teacher increases eye contact when he wants to admire or confirm students in the classroom.

According to the aforementioned issues, the following research questions were formulated.

- Does eye contact have any impact on language learning?
- Does eye contact between teacher and students in the classroom improve language learning?

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

This study tries to investigate the impact of eye-contact between teacher and student on language learning. The sample of this study consisted of 60 female third grade junior high school students in a private school in Shahrekord, Iran. The English level of all students was similar.

One class with 30 students was experimental group and the other class with 30 students was the control group. Teacher teaches one selected lesson from an English book in the experimental class. In this group teacher uses his eye contact communication with student during teaching. After each paragraph teaching, teacher asks some questions. In the control group class teacher teaches exactly the same text to the students but now he doesn't use any eye contact communication with student. Teacher asks some question after each paragraph teaching. The gathered data was analyzed via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Actually the questions of the study can be answered according to the following results. Results due to the main research question are going to be discussed in the following Tables:

Table 1. Paired Sample Test

Groups	Pretest	Posttest	N	MD	t	P
Experimental	14	16.55	30	2.55	5.766	.000
Control	14.15	13.96	30	.19	.416	.681

As shown in Table 1, the experimental group gained significant improvement in their language learning after teacher eye contact attention. As a contrast in the experimental group, there was no significant difference identified in the control group.

Table 2. Independent Sample Test

Tests	Experimental	Control	N	MD	t	P
Pre	14	14.15	30	.15	.182	.856
Post	16.55	13.96	30	2.58	3.400	.001

As Table 2 indicates, there was no significant difference between the two groups of students toward learning language in the pretest. But there was a significant difference between the two groups in the posttest.

In sum, the results of the intergroup and the intragroup comparisons of the tests indicated that the experimental group gained significantly achievement toward learning language. The obtained results of this study can answer the research question that there is positive relation between teacher-student eye contact and language learning. The significant gains of the experimental group on the tests supported this result.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2011) teachers are not in the classroom just to correct speech and writing. The teacher role is to create learning conditions and gives students the chance to produce language. A good teacher should encourage learners to make eye contact while they are working together in pairs or groups. Eyes can set the tone of a lesson. As the lesson starts, teacher should talk to learners, not to the book, the board or the screen. It makes motivation in the class. Research shows that there is a strong link between the amount of eye contact people receive and their degree of participation in group communication and language learning (Ushioda, 2008).

A teacher is learning language as making eye contact. It is important to have a good eye contact with learners. It does not mean staring or gazing, three to five seconds eye contact for non-verbal communication. If a learner actively seeks out eye contact when talking, he or she is judged to be more believable, confident and competent. Eye contact is, fundamentally, time and effort saving with specific messages delivered by eye and facial expression. Teacher can use eye contact as a correction technique too. The greater the eye contact, the closer the relationship.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to shed light on the role of eye contact between teacher and student in language learning through reviewing some of the most influential and considerable research in the field. The result of this study can support teacher strategies for language teaching and students for language learning.

Although great factors can influence the quality of language learning in the classroom, but this factor according the result of this study can lead to effective language learning. Teachers cannot simply place student together and expect them to work well and learn language perfectly.

The result obtained in this study may have pedagogical implications for developing language learning that fit into the language educational curriculum adequately. In this study there are some limitations of which need to be taken into account in further investigations in the field. Firstly the level of the participants the other one was the number of participants that was another burden on the generalizability, and the last but not the least was the gender of the subjects (all female). Although this study suggests that eye-contact between teacher and student can influence language learning in the

classroom, these result could likely be enhanced. The positive effects found may be strengthened by providing more time and opportunities in the classroom.

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