

Relationship between teachers' non-verbal immediacy behaviors and students' motivation: An evidence from Pakistani ESL classrooms

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Abstract

This study focused on finding the relationship, which might exist, between non-verbal immediacy behaviors of teachers and students' motivation in Pakistani ESL classrooms. The study adopted a quantitative survey design for which questionnaire was developed for data collection purposes. The researchers focused on finding answer to how do students perceive their respective teachers' nonverbal behaviour in Pakistani ESL classes, and whether any relationship exists between teachers' non-verbal immediacy behavior and students' class motivation. Sample of the research study consisted of university students in order to ascertain the afore-mentioned relationship in ESL classrooms. Findings of the study show that there exist both motivating and de-motivating factors which have strong relationship with teachers' non-verbal immediacy behaviors. Students' perceptions of teacher's immediacy behaviors are positively connected with student's class motivation. In light of the findings, the study has suggested some recommendations regarding teachers' immediacy role in the motivation of their students.

Keywords: De-motivators, ESL classroom, Immediacy behavior, Motivators, Non-verbal

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Introduction

This article explored the relationship between teachers' non-verbal immediacy behaviors and students' motivation as evidenced in Pakistani ESL classrooms. 'Immediacy', is a concept developed by a social psychologist, Mehrabian in 1969, who argued that immediacy behaviors, create a perception of physical and psychological closeness between communicators (Allen, Witt & Wheelless, 2006) and reduce distance between people (Andersen, 1979). Also, teachers have been identified as a crucial factor in rendering learning effective (Nasr, Booth & Gillett, 1996), particularly in English classrooms where learners' learning depends a great deal on teacher's teaching (Wen & Clément, 2003). Dörnyei's description of teachers (2001) clearly shows that teachers' motivational behavior in their classrooms impacts students' levels of motivation. Thus, a research study attempting to explore such a relationship seemed to have been useful to the relevant stakeholders to improve the classroom teaching and learning environment.

Rationale of the study

Researchers have examined teacher's immediacy in a classroom context in a variety of disciplines; the most substantial body of research has been carried out in communication, psychology, and education disciplines. But the role of teacher's nonverbal behaviors has received relatively less attention in other studies (Ellis, 2004; Marcia et al., 2017), specifically as it applies to learning of English as a subject (Hsu, 2010). In other words, the dearth exists in L2 classroom contexts and within applied linguistics (Babad, 2007; McCafferty & Stam, 2008). The need for investigating any possible relationship between teacher's immediacy behaviors and student's motivation in L2 context has also been expressed by Velez and Cano (2008), who pointed out that teacher's immediacy and students' motivation are closely bound constructs worthy of further research. Moreover, nonverbal communication in general and teacher's nonverbal behaviors in particular remains the most crucial but neglected part of Pakistani educational system (Chaudary & Arif, 2012).

Literature review

According to Ward and Raffler- Engel (1980: 229), "What ultimately structures human behavior in communicative interaction is the meaning of the message which is being exchanged. The meaning is conveyed both verbally and nonverbally". Teachers facilitate their verbal behavior through their use of body language, which may lead to better comprehension and learning of the course material by the students (Sprinshall & Sprinshall, 1994).

Teacher's immediacy

Immediacy' is a concept that describes teachers' positive characteristics. This concept was originally introduced and developed by a social psychologist, Albert Mehrabian (1969), in terms of his "principle of immediacy" in his study of interpersonal communication. Mehrabian (1969) viewed "immediacy" as a set of behaviors, occurring during interpersonal and/or group communication, that would "enhance closeness to and nonverbal interactions with another" (p. 203). Learning L2 effectively needs a supportive atmosphere (Hsu, 2010). Teacher's immediacy has been described by majority researchers as a significant type of teacher's behaviors which affect students (Moore et al., 1996; Marcia et al., 2017). It includes teacher's both non-verbal and verbal behaviors that occur during teacher-student interaction (Allen, Witt & Wheelless, 2006) though most of the studies on immediacy have disregarded verbal behaviors as part of the immediacy construct (Andersen, Andersen & Jensen, 1979; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998) and included only nonverbal behaviors in their measurement of 'immediacy'. According to Frymier and Weser (2001), and Witt and Wheelless (2001), a supportive classroom environment is produced when teachers exhibit immediacy through the use of non-verbal communication behaviors, such as body tenseness, eye contact, and smiling (Burgoon, Birk & Pfau, 1990). Hsu (2010) argues that teachers can capture learner's interest and maintain their motivation for learning English if the teacher utilizes immediacy behaviors (Hsu, 2010).

The effectiveness of non-verbal immediacy behavior, grounded in a reinforcement paradigm which underlies the attraction theory (Mehrabian, 1981) states that a person approaches that stimuli which provides him/her rewards or/and avoid that stimulus which is not rewarding (Allen, Witt & Wheelless, 2006). That is why, immediacy behaviors that teachers display in communicative interactions or/and acts with students, might be viewed as rewarding (Allen, Witt & Wheelless, 2006). It further follows that such rewarding behavior might be served as a reinforcement for the interaction, feedback and attentive behavior of the students which increases cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning (Allen, Witt & Wheelless, 2006). Immediate instructors who “use pro-social, reward-oriented compliance gaining strategies” (p. 240) have more chances to enhance their students’ learning, which would be so as those instructors stimulated motivation of the students to learn (Gorham & Christophel, 1992). More often attraction is reciprocal (Sorensen & Christophel, 1992). Hence, teacher conveys immediacy in the classroom through proximity and reinforcement in order to contribute to interpersonal attraction (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995).

Relationship between Teacher’s Non-Verbal Immediacy Behaviors and Students’ Motivation

If teachers can make their classrooms places where students enjoy coming [...] where the atmosphere is supportive, we can make a positive contribution to students’ motivation to learn. (Lightbown & Spada, 1999: p. 57)

By saying so, Lightbrown and Spada (1999) assert teachers’ role in evoking student’s motivation and producing the required atmosphere for it. The term ‘motivation’, here, implies force which stimulates students to learn (Noels, 2001), arouse interest, involvement or positive attitude towards subject being taught. While the term ‘de-motivation’, in this study, refers to the force that decreases students’ energy to learn (Noels, 2001) and arouses dislike, negative attitude and/or affect involvement. Also, behavior is a very broad term and there are many different types of teacher behavior.

Although many other factors contribute to student’s motivation for learning English, a great deal of research indicates that teachers’ non-verbal behavior impact and play an extremely important and crucial role in learner’s motivation in a language classroom (Mahmud & Yaacob, 2007). It is found having a significant positive correlation with student’s motivation for learning and functions as a way of enhancing student’s motivation to learn (Allen, Witt & Wheelless, 2006; Hsu, 2010; Rosnani, 2003; Saechou, 2005). Nonverbal communication creates better impact upon student’s mind and heart by complementing the verbal message so much so that the same verbal message may lead to the creation and interpretation of opposite meaning by students because of the way the message is conveyed nonverbally (Chaudry & Arif, 2012). In fact, nonverbal cues such as gestures, eye contact, face expressions, and teacher’ posture are strongly linked with speech information communicated to students (Chaudry & Arif, 2012). Thus, effective communication

which is considered essential for better understanding of classroom instructions is not possible if nonverbal behavior is neglected (Chaudry & Arif, 2012).

Nonverbal immediacy indirectly influences students' learning levels by modifying their classroom motivation (Christophel, 1990). Students' perceptions of teachers' behaviors influence their learning motivation (Allen, Witt & Wheelless, 2006). Perhaps teacher's non-verbal behavior greatly impacts students' cognitive performance in terms of a long-term relationship of teaching, when such a behavior has more opportunity to influence student motivation, which is one of the important mediators of academic performance (Rosenthal & Harris, 2005).

Skinner and Belmont (1993) conducted a research regarding how behavior of teachers affected learner's learning motivation. The study concluded that a reciprocal relationship existed between teacher's behavior and learner's engagement in the classroom. Also, it was found that teacher's behavior affected learners' engagement; both emotional and behavioral. The students experience happiness and behave more enthusiastically in class when they come across teachers' affection and warmth (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Skinner and Belmont (1993) argued that teacher's behaviors influence learners' perceptions of their interaction with the teachers. Involvement of teachers with individual learners bears the most powerful influence on learners' perceptions of their teacher (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Skinner and Belmont (1993) Path Analysis and Motivation Model (see Figure 1 & 2 below) explains the pattern how teacher's behavior affect students' motivation. Teacher involvement implies the quality of interpersonal relationship between teachers and students (Reeve, 1996).

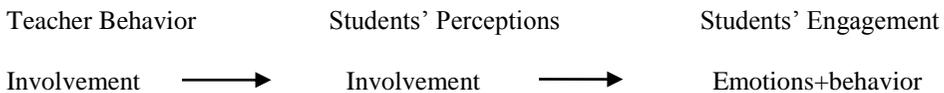


Figure 1: Path Analysis

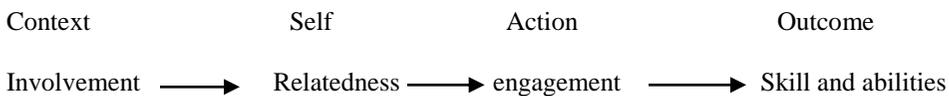
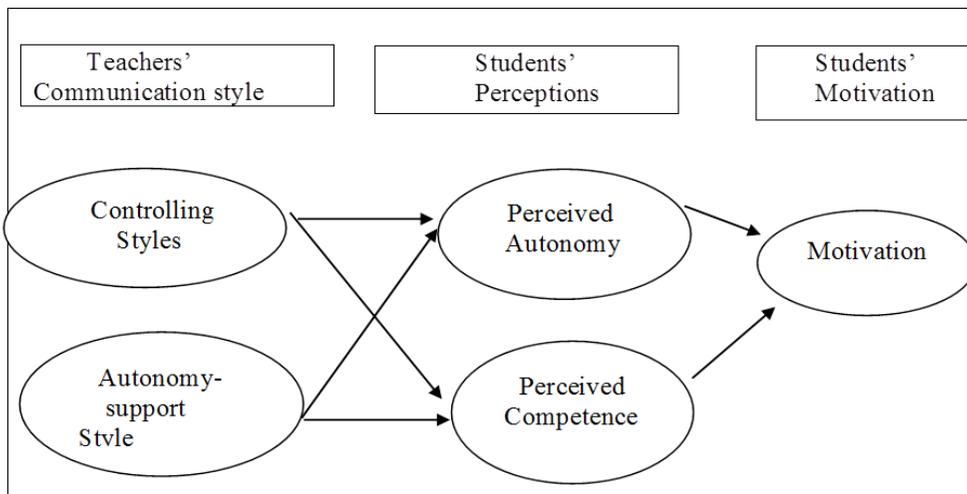


Figure 2: Motivation Model

Such a relationship has been further demonstrated quite comprehensively by Neols (2011) in his following model, providing theoretical framework for this study. Theoretical framework of the study highlighted)



In EFL/ESL classroom

An argument has been advanced above on the significance and use of nonverbal immediacy behavior generally in teaching. But when it is about teaching a foreign language (FL), English in the present research context, English teachers have an influential and positive effect on students' linguistic performance as well as their emotional perception. Allen (2000) discovered that in a FL classroom, student reported that the teacher's use of nonverbal behaviors induced an encouraging atmosphere for learning. Moskowitz (1976) also discovered that FL teachers who were viewed outstanding by students, exhibited a higher frequency of nonverbal behaviors than other, lower-rated FL teachers. Furthermore, Ward and Von Raffel-Engel (1980) found that students showed the tendency to be more attentive when the L2 teacher used direct eye contact and erect posture than when he was not engaged in such behaviors. The language of body expression and motion plays a pivotal role in the language classroom (Negi, 2009). Teachers create more impression through their non-verbal behaviors in classroom than the verbal fluency and knowledge of subject matter (Negi, 2009). In case of the research context, Pakistan, the status of English is that of a second language and is taught as a compulsory part of the curriculum. The following research questions further explore afore-mentioned relationship in Pakistani ESL classes.

Research questions

1. How do students perceive their respective teachers' nonverbal behaviour in Pakistani ESL classes?
2. What is the relationship between teachers' non-verbal immediacy behavior and students' motivation?

Hypothesis

There is a positive relationship between teachers' non-verbal immediacy behavior and students' motivation.

Methodology

The study was conducted in the English department at a Pakistani public sector university which is located in one of its rural cities, Mardan, employing a sample of 51 postgraduate students of English. The sample included 22 males and 28 females, with an age ranging from 21 to 25, and was chosen by applying convenient sampling method. All participants were masters final semester students. They were recruited from two classes, one having total strength of 25 students and the other 26 students. All students belonged to the same area Mardan and were native speakers of Pushto language, learning English as a second language in the University. In order to control the maximum variables, almost equal proportion of male and female students, having same L1 background, almost same ages, and same level of language ability were chosen.

A pre-designed pencil and paper based self-reported questionnaire was used in the study to know the students' perceptions regarding their teachers' motivating and de-motivating nonverbal behaviour. The rationale for employing such a questionnaire was based on the presumed familiarity of the learners with this type of survey, as a Likert scale questionnaire is a most widely employed document in academic institutions for teachers and course evaluation. Moreover, motivation resides within an individual, which is not directly observable, therefore, in this kind of a situation, a person's behavior can better be described through instruments such as interviews and questionnaires (Madrid & Canado, 2001).

The instrument was partially designed by the researcher while most of the questions were developed from the ideas and questions used in previous studies. The most common study among these, for the development of Nonverbal Immediacy Scale (NIS) for measuring learners' perceptions of instructor's nonverbal immediacy behaviors, is the one by Richmond, Gorham and McCroskey (1987). This study was further complemented by listing factors from other relevant studies, such as, Ozmen (2011), and Babad (2007). For a detailed explanation regarding the development of questionnaire and which questions items did the researcher/s developed and which were adapted, and their justification, see a study by Shakir (2020). In order to save time and get specific results, the questionnaire was designed in a way to draw students' attention specifically to 38 teachers' nonverbal behaviors by giving them prompts. These 38 teachers' nonverbal behaviors were listed after an extensive literature review and were set as parameters for the evaluation of

students (taken as a sample) in terms of the following categories: motivators, demotivators, and no affect. The summated Cronbach alpha reliability for the revised instrument (after piloting) was calculated which turned out to be 0.71.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach Alpha	No of Items
0.71	38

Questionnaires were circulated and data was gathered approximately during last week of the semester in order to ensure adequate time for students to gain sufficient familiarity with the class as well as the teachers' nonverbal behaviors. In order to avoid potential bias and alleviate the participants' discomfort that could occur due to direct individualized teacher evaluation, the students were asked not to rate and reference the behavior of any specific teacher, but the behavior of any English teacher(s) in their experience based upon their general English classes since the commencement of their current academic program. Such a method allowed receipt of data from a range of teachers and classes (Christophel, 1990). Since the questionnaire did not ask to make a reference to any specific teacher, it was expected that this might facilitate generating a better data regarding the teachers' behaviors.

Findings

Quantitative analysis of the data was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v. 17.0). The scale scores (using the mean) were calculated, and the reliability of the scale (0.71) was assessed. All the variables were codified as shown in the Table 1 e.g., TST for 'teacher sits close to students....'.

Correlation analysis

In order to determine the validity of questionnaire, item analysis to total Correlation was computed (Table 1). All the items were summated, and their correlation analyzed by Pearson and Spearman correlation technique in order to determine any possible relationships between all variables.

Table 1: Correlation analysis

Variables	Items	Correlation	Significance
Physical Proximity	1) TTC	(0.752)**	(.000)
	2) TTS	(0.279)*	(.050)
Body Movement	1) TSD	(0.667)**	(0.000)
	2) TMC	(0.285)*	(0.045)
Gestures	1) TGS	(0.509)**	(0.000)
	2) TWS	(0.013)*	(0.930)
Body Position	1) TMN	(0.780)**	(0.000)
	2) TTB	(0.082)*	(0.570)
Appearance			
Facial Expression	1) TCT	(0.391)**	(0.005)
	2) TAT	(0.020)	(0.890)
Eye contact	1) TME	(.510)**	(0.000)
	2) TCI	(.496)**	(0.000)

Table 1 displays the results of a correlation analysis of 7 broader variables indicating two items each with high and low significant correlation for each 7 variables. Each item on the scale correlates with the other items. The correlations, which are significant, and appeared in this research were between 0.780 and .020 with the teacher moving or acting nervously/restlessly in class (substantial $r = .780$, $p < .001$), the teacher's behaviour of maintaining eye contact with individual students (moderate $r = .496$, $p < .001$) and the teacher is serious when talking to students (weak $r = .013$, $p > 0.100$). Except for only few weak significant categories, all of the variables in this study were found to be significantly correlated. This shows the positive relationship between all variables (non-verbal behaviors) and that all measure the same dimension i.e., teacher behavior.

Seven broader variables

All the 38 nonverbal immediacy items were divided into seven broader variables. These were physical proximity, body movements/orientation, gestures, body position, informal appearance/dress, facial expression, and eye contact. Teacher's non-verbal immediacy behaviors in terms of these seven variables were also computed. The descriptives statics reported in Table 2 below, presented in a rank order, establishes the more and less motivating and de-motivating 7 variables.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations for the variables

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
Physical Proximity	2.30	.407
Body movement/orientation	2.33	.343
gestures	2.33	.184
Body position	1.94	.303
Informal appearance/dress	1.26	.527
Facial expression	1.99	.214
Eye contact	2.03	.325

The above Table 2 and the bar graphs below highlights the fact that in terms of broader variables, physical proximity, body movements, gestures, and eye contact, with body movement leading them all, tends to be perceived as motivating by student-participants. Whereas teacher's informal appearance/dress tends to be perceived as quite de-motivating. Facial expression and body position appeared as least motivating factors for the participants.

The findings, which were about the relationship between teacher's non-verbal immediacy behaviors and student's motivation, also show that the mean value indicating option "no effect" was received only once for only one item i.e., the teacher looks at the board or notes during teaching, which shows that only this behavior has been perceived by students as having 'no affect' on their motivation. This implies two things; either the behavior might not have been perceived as immediate hence motivating by students or immediate but not important in terms of affecting their motivation. This result i.e., 1 item out of 38 carries no significance and is quite a negligible ratio to be taken into account or to derive any conclusions from it. Thus, it can be concluded that a relationship exists between teacher's non-verbal immediacy behaviors and student's motivation, hence confirming the hypothesis of the study.

By looking at the above matched sets of the motivator - de-motivator category, it is quite interesting to note that most of the motivator categories can be matched with de-motivator categories, which reflected conceptually similar areas. When students were referring to a particular teacher's behavior, for example, maintaining eye contact, perceiving, and noting it as a motivator; at the same time, they thought of and noted the teacher's avoiding of eye contact up front as a de-motivator. Likewise, while students perceived teacher's use of gestures or relax body position as motivational behaviors, they perceived and listed the teacher's avoiding gestures and tense body positions upfront as de-motivating. Thus, the data can be analyzed from different various perspectives, thereby reaching the same conclusion about teacher's motivating and de-motivating nonverbal immediacy behaviors. The variation in the mean value among different nonverbal behaviors reveals the relative

more or less importance of one behavior over the other in terms of their contribution to either students' motivation or de-motivation.

The findings are significant in a number of ways. The result supported findings from previous studies (Allen, Witt, & Wheelless, 2006; Hsu et al., 2007; Rodríguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006) which show that:

-Teacher's non-verbal immediacy behavior bears a significant relationship with learner's/student's motivation i.e., immediacy do impact students' motivation (either by motivating or de-motivating them). However, whether the motivation is a trait (natural) or state (situation-specific) is not measured in this study.

-Students' perceptions of their teacher's immediacy behaviors have a positive relationship with their class motivation.

-Students perceive teacher's apparently immediate non-verbal behaviors as the source of their motivation i.e., having positive effect on their motivation.

-Students perceive teacher's apparently non-immediate non-verbal behaviors as the sources of their de-motivation i.e., were found having a negative impact on students' motivation.

The results of this study also show that teacher's non-verbal immediacy bears a significant relationship with learner's/student's motivation regardless of culture (Pakistan in this case). The results thus allowed a comprehensive understanding about the interrelatedness of nonverbal immediacy and motivation.

Discussion

Acknowledging the positive effects of teacher's behaviors of immediacy on student's motivation suggested by previous studies (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Frymier, 1993; Harrison, 2011; Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Pogue & Ahyun, 2007; Sidelinger, 2010) and interested by the significance of teacher's nonverbal immediacy behaviors in influencing student's motivation, this empirical study was conducted in order to investigate the said relationship in Pakistani university ESL classes. The study individually assessed, through students' perceptions, 38 teacher's nonverbal immediacy behaviors derived from previous studies. In conclusion, this study examined how teacher's individual immediacy behaviors students perceive affect their motivation in Pakistani ESL classes.

The study confirmed the findings of these studies in that teacher's use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors can increase student's motivation and liking for teacher and the subject taught and hence their interest or motivation. However, a more recent study by Furlich (2016) concluded that although a positive relationship exists between instructor verbal immediacy behaviors and student motivation to learn, she did not find any relationship for instructor nonverbal immediacy and student motivation to learn. One possible explanation might be that it is impractical to expect instructors with larger class sizes (as was the situation in this study) to have an opportunity to talk with the majority of their students (Furlich, 2016).

Nonverbal immediacy behavior of teachers is an important determiner of student's motivation. Motivation is not unimportant for students (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2004). Mehrabian (1969, 1981) rightly points out, as can be concluded from the findings, that the influence of nonverbal immediacy increases the source attractiveness, thus bridging the gap between communicator and receiver. Given the research findings, it is quite apparent that a teacher's nonverbal immediacy significantly impacts and relates to students' motivation in terms of either motivating or de-motivating students though certain behaviors motivates more and certain less. It can be argued, as Mehrabian (1972) said, that immediacy is a behavior that "increase[s] mutual sensory stimulation between two people" (p.6); it's a kind of approach behavior which reflect positive attitude and closeness towards the other (1966, 1972). Therefore, using non-verbal immediacy ascertains the positive impact of a message and hence builds up a positive relationship among communicators (Mehrabian, 1971).

The data clearly supports the approach-avoidance and attraction theory which explains immediacy phenomenon in almost similar manner. The behaviors perceived as motivating by respondents were possibly so on account of their communication of immediacy (shown by their interview responses). Thus, employing non-verbal behavior in an immediate manner ensures the positive impact of a message. An instructor who exhibits enthusiasm and try to engage the learners in a classroom is likely to be perceived as positive. It is quite reasonable to have an assumption that learners will feel that the teacher is excited about the material, cares about students and wants them to engage in the learning process (Frymier & Housier, 2000). High levels of perceived (generated by specific behaviors which the teacher uses) immediacy increases learners' approach behaviors and enhances their enthusiasm level and/or commitment to the learning task (Frymier, 1994; Christophel & Gorham, 1995). This trajectory is clearly represented in the figures 1 and 2 above. According to attraction theory, attraction is often reciprocal, e.g., one of the interviewees words "happy and lively teacher makes me happy" shows this reciprocation. Teachers' nonverbal immediacy behaviors contribute to positive interpersonal relationships with learners whereby students feel that they are accepted and supported; concurrently, increasing the learners' motivation for learning (Rogers, 1983; Frymier, 1994; Witt & Wheelless, 2001; Li, 2003). Motivation which resides within an individual also acts reciprocally with the environment (Noels, 2001).

Although results of the study are interesting enough to be served as the basis for further qualitative or quantitative studies having larger samples from a wide range of contexts, given the experimental approach of this study, sample size and analysis procedures, the findings should be interpreted with a little caution.

Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from this research is that nonverbal behaviors of teachers are an important aspect of communication between teachers and students in a class. In general, this study confirms the previous findings that teachers who demonstrate

nonverbal immediate behaviors with learners are likely to be viewed in a relatively more positive way than the teachers who are not engaged in such behaviors (Saechou, 2005) and that learners' motivation for learning English is more likely to enhance when instructors demonstrate non-verbal immediacy during teaching (Hsu, 2010). Findings revealed that students who experienced teachers' behaviors seemingly high in immediacy experienced greater motivation, and those who experienced teachers' behaviors seemingly low in immediacy experienced less motivation.

Some may also argue that teacher's immediacy is less important at the university level as compared to the pre-university level, because of the advance and more mature level of students. While it may be true that nonverbal behavior may, to some extent, not be that important at university level, it does influence students to some extent depending on the nature of students. Thus, while it is important to study nonverbal immediacy at school and college levels, immediacy is still an important issue needed to be studied at the university level. Teachers at the college and university level are not usually encouraged to think about their relationship with students beyond that which are clearly inappropriate (Frymier & Houser, 2000). However, there is growing evidence that effective teaching not only involves expertise and an effective delivery of the content but also includes personal communication between teachers and students (Frymier & Houser, 2000). When a caring relationship establishes between students and teachers, a safe learning environment comes in existence. Perhaps what is required is to conduct an in-depth research to examine the specific connection between teacher's immediacy and approach-avoidance. The identification of specific non-verbal communication mannerisms can be facilitated through videotaping selective lectures and then reviewing them for any possible motivational and de-motivational nonverbal communication practices. Thus, how immediacy research could be harnessed to further improve the educational practices still needs exploration.

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