EFL Teachers' and Students' Gestures: N-VC Strategy in an Online Classroom

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the teacher' and students' gestures, and the function of the gestures in an online EFL classroom. The researcher applied a qualitative research design. The subject of research was 9 students, 2 teachers in the English Department, and an expert in expression. The research instruments were passive participant observation, interview, and documentation. The result of the research revealed that both the teachers and students used gestures. Teachers applied speech-independent and speech-related gestures. The speech-relate gestures were clenching, pointing, and raising hands. In contrast, the speech-independent gestures were nodding with nothing to do with what she was explaining. However, students' gestures were often invisible on the screen due to the constraints of limited screenshots. The function of gestures was to substitute words and instruction. Additionally being mindful of their gestures can send mixed signals or unintentionally convey negative emotions or attitudes. So, all teachers must consciously use gestures to support their message. The study's novelty lies in its focus on the online EFL classroom context, a relatively unexplored area in the field of language education research. By examining the specific strategies used in an online setting, this study provides new insights into the role of N-VC in virtual learning environments. This is particularly relevant given the increasing reliance on online education due to recent global events, making the findings timely and applicable.

Keywords: EFL teachers, EFL students, gestures, online classroom

1. Introduction

Human beings sometimes do not realize that they are always communicating with each other without saying anything. They do not always communicate by speaking but also with their gestures. For example, when a child is asked by his mother whether he has eaten or not, he can just nod his head if the answer is yes, but he can move his head from side to side if the answer is no. From that movement or gesture, the mother directly knows the answer of her question even though the child says nothing.

Non-Verbal Communication, next it is written N-VC. It plays an important role in human social interaction because it is more honest than verbal communication. In this regard, Abercrombie (1968: 55) states what is generally taken for granted: "We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our entire bodies." Every facial expression and every gesture contribute to the overall meaning of a statement. Our body language, thus accompanies every of speech act we make, and even if we do not speak, our non-verbal behaviour constantly transmits information that can be meaningful.

N-VC serves to make the audiences' stay focused on the public speaker when delivering something. By getting the attention of the audience, ideas will be easier to convey. N-VC through body language can be used to attract the audience's attention. One of them is the truth of something in public speaking. Audiences' will better understand the truth behind information because public speaker shows these true signs. This body movement is included in the language of N-VC.

Birdwhistell (1955), one of the pioneers in research on N-VC, estimates that in a conversation up to 65% of what is transmitted in the social, in interpersonal level is conveyed non-verbally. This implies that a considerable part of any message that people are sending and receiving is encoded and decoded non-verbally. Consequently, although only recently, non-verbal phenomena have become the focus of interest in various disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and linguistics (cf. Kendon 2004).

Education is a social activity based on communication during the last decade. Ways of communicating within the educational context have changed due to the emergence and growth of online education. Students and instructors participating in web-based courses experience the need to learn how to use this channel to exchange unambiguous messages and build supportive learning communities (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2018). Since communities are formed through interpersonal relationships comprised of both verbal and nonverbal communication, it is necessary to examine how an online learning community can establish interpersonal relationships despite the lack of traditional nonverbal cues usually present in face-to-face interactions.

In the context of teaching and learning in an online EFL classroom, however, Non-Verbal phenomena have not been given sufficient attention (cf. Eßer 2007: 320; Knabe 2007: 13). Language classes have traditionally emphasized verbal communication. Although the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages does at least intermittently pick up on N-VC (cf. 4.4.5), the way this is dealt with does not suffice. The text sporadically refers to body language in terms of pointing, gestures and mimes to support the verbal reference – but it does not include a structured and explicit description of non-verbal competences. Similarly, most manuals for foreign language teaching does not include materials and exercises that focus on N-VC (cf. Reimann 2012: 36; Özkul 2012: 17).

And yet, several recent publications in the domain of foreign language teaching show that non-verbal forms of communication are very important not only for the teaching of language, but also for intercultural learning. Gulnaz and Ismaiel (2017) had conducted research entitled "Teaching and Learning Beyond Words: The Significance of Nonverbal Communication in Saudi EFL Classrooms" which focused on male and female Saudi EFL learners. The work utilized both qualitative cum quantitative methods to collect the data. Another research had done by Karim and Sotoudehnama in (2017), entitled "A Qualitative Study on Teacher's Nonverbal Communication and Iranian EFL Learners' Perception of Language Learning" which also focused on four main categories of N-VC including: hand gesture, eye-contact, facial expression and tone of voice. The findings are certain recommendations have been incorporated for EFL/ESL teachers for effective use of N-VC in the classrooms. Furthermore, responses of the participants clearly manifest that they do not only have the capability to understand and distinguish

between encouraging and discouraging paralinguistic behaviourof the teacher but these cues also enhance their motivation and curiosity to learn a foreign language, thus suggesting teacher to be more conscious and sensitive about using these cues in the classroom.

Teachers' comprehension of N-VC is crucial to the teaching and learning process. The classroom can be either pleasant or bad depending on the teacher's nonverbal cues. The teacher-student relationship will be greatly influenced by the teacher's demeanor, posture, voice, touching, facial and eye contact, and proximity. It could also have an impact on the students' motivation and comprehension of the material. According to Richmond (2002), pupils are more likely to listen, learn, and have a more favorable attitude toward school when their teachers enhance their affect through good nonverbal conduct. The secret to improving students' affective and cognitive learning is for teachers and students to communicate effectively in the classroom. Similarly, Witt and Wheeless (1999) proposed that students are more satisfied and learn more when teachers act in a nonverbally immediate manner. Classroom teachers who use N-VC strategies like smiling, making eye contact, conversing up close, and using gestures help students become more committed.

According to Annisah (2013), one of the most often utilized N-VC strategies by teachers in the classroom is a gesture. Adler and Rodman (2006) assert that gestures—movements involving a single body part—are an essential component of communication. A gesture is an expressive movement or action that is typically performed with the head, hands, arms, or sometimes the entire body (Bunglowala & Bunglowala, 2015).

Gestures are movements that people make with their hands, face and head to show a particular meaning. This definition suggest that the visible bodily actions performed through hands, head and face hold meaning for their own and are used to convey particular messages among interlocutors. The face is rich in communicative potential. It is the primary site for communication of emotional states, it reflects interpersonal attitudes; it provides non-verbal feedback on the comments of others; and some scholars say it is the primary source of information next to human speech. For these reasons, and because of the gestures visibility, people pay a great deal of attention to the messages people receive from the gestures of others. From this definition, it can infer that interlocutors are hyper attentive to the gestures of others for the great deal of meaning and impressions they can genuinely express.

2. Methodology

This research employed descriptive qualitative reserach. It aimed to figure out the role of students' gestures in EFL classroom. The research was conducted in English Department of Universitas Sulawesi Barat. The subject of the research were two teachers, nine students in academic year of 2023-2024, and an expert of micro expressions. The

applied purposive sampling technique to select the teacher and student participants. The researcher selected those with the longest teaching experiences, Teacher NH and Teacher AI while nine students were chosen from their classes. The researcher subjects asked for anonymity, so for the sake of research ethics, the researcher decided to hide the subjects' identities by only putting their initials.

The data were collected throung passive participant observation, interview, documentation, and followed some procedures. First, the researcher analyzed the data using the model proposed by Miles and Hubermain (1994), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity, those are data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The researcher performed classroom observation of the teaching process through Zoom cloud and it was recorded. The interview session was performed after the data from video recordings had beed transcribed and analyzed.

And finally in ensuring validity, the researcher did the triangulation of data. Technique of triangulation involves triangulating among different data sources (assuing investigators collects more than one), writing detailed and thick description, and taking the entire written narrative back to participants in member checking all reasonably easy procedures to conduct. In other words, the researcher uses the different techniques of data collection to find out the same data and triangulation of source which means technique used to find out the data through different sources with the same technique.

Consequently, in this study, the researcher used them to make credibility for this research. It could be seen process of triangulation through the framework as follows:
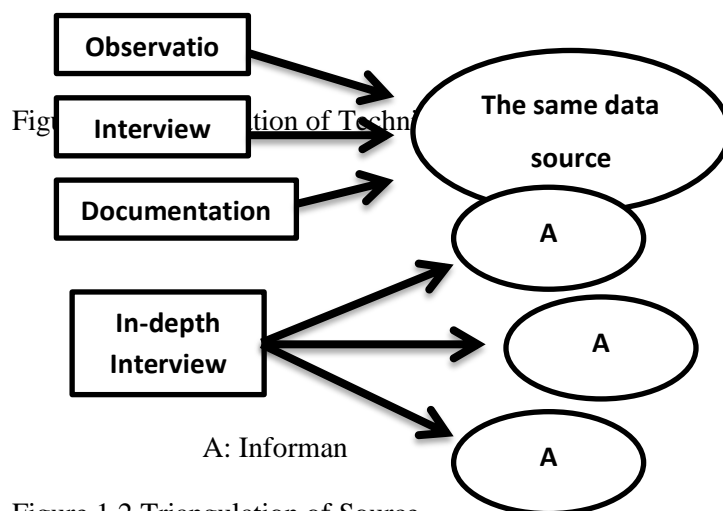
Figure 1.1 Triangulation of Technique

Observatio

Interview

Documentation

The same data source

A

In-depth Interview

A

A: Informan

A

Figure 1.2 Triangulation of Source

3. Finding

a. Kinds and Function of EFL Teachers' Gestures in Online Classroom

Table 1.1 EFL Teachers' Gestures in Online Classroom

No	Gestures	Class observation		Σ
		Teacher AI	**Teacher NH**	
1	speech-independent gestures		√	1
2	speech-related gestures	√	√	2

The transcription of interview from Teacher AI, it is about gesture in online classroom can be seen in the following interview quotes:

"Dalam kelas online menurut saya yang paling efektif ditekankan di sini ya itu tadi bu, gesture dan intonasi suara."

(Translation) "In online classroom, In my private opinion, the most effective is the integration gesture and tone of voice."
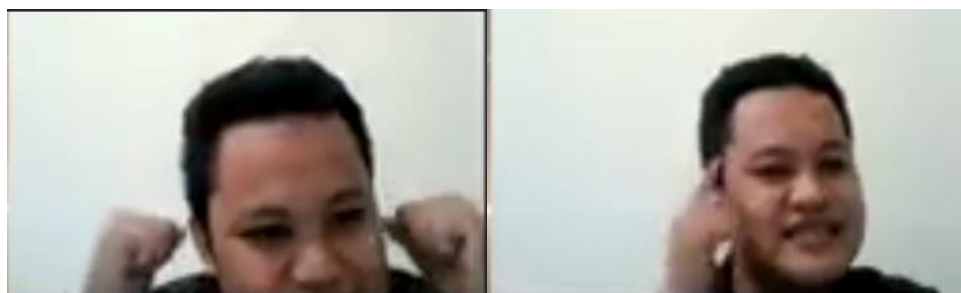

Figure 1.3. Teacher AI' gestures.

Another statement comes from Teacher NH who stated her opinion as the following quotes:

"Jika dilihat kemampuan komunikasi non-verbal mahasiswa, khususnya dalam online, pengamatan saya menunjukkan adanya dominasi penggunaan komunikasi verbal daripada non-verbal dalam interaksi mahasiswa selama pembelajaran online. Oleh karena itu, untuk mengoptimalkan proses pembelajaran, saya membagi kelompok mahasiswa yang tidak terlalu besar. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan integrasi yang lebih efektif antara berbagai aspek komunikasi, mempertimbangkan peran apa yang ingin dinilai dan yang dimainkan oleh komunikasi non-verbal dalam kelompok kecil pembelajaran tersebut. Jadi saya selalu memberi contoh ketika ngajar dengan tujuan mereka bisa mengikutinya, misalnya gesture".

(Translation) "If we look at students' non-verbal communication skills, especially in the online aspect, I see that there is a dominance of the use of verbal communication over non-verbal in student interactions during learning. Therefore, to optimize the learning process, I divided student groups that were not too large. This approach allows for more effective integration between different aspects of communication, considering what role you want to assess, and which non-verbal communication plays in the small learning group. I always give an example so make they can imitate, such as gesture".

Figure 1.4. Teacher NH' gestures

Each teacher in the study had their own distinctive set of teaching gestures. Teacher AI in emphasized his points with hand and head gestures. He made some gestures that went along with his explanation, like clenching his fists in support while saying, "Young people must be enthusiastic. He added the words "smart" and "upgrade" while pointing to his head and raising his right hand (see in Figure 1.3). Teacher NH used fewer head gestures than Teacher AI, mostly nodding, and some of her gestures had nothing to do with what she was explaining. It means that Teacher NH' gesture is independent that did not relate to her speech.

According to Wahyudi (2020), gestures are often done subconsciously, but it is crucial for teachers to be conscious of their gestures when teaching. By doing so, they can better control their N-VC and ensure that their message is effectively conveyed to their students. Additionally, being mindful of their gestures can also help teachers avoid sending mixed signals or unintentionally conveying negative emotions or attitudes.

Overall, despite the fact that each teacher in the study used a unique set of gestures, it is crucial for all teachers to be conscious of how their N-VC strategies affects their instruction. Teachers can improve their instruction and better engage their students by consciously using gestures to support their message.

Due to limited visibility, evaluating students' speaking skills in large or online classes has inherent obstacles. Still, educators must assess their students' level of proficiency. Teachers use both individual and group work evaluations in a categorizing method to address this. It becomes clear that doing group projects in an online classroom is a practical and efficient way to assess students' speaking skills. This approach contributes to a comprehensive understanding of students' oral communication abilities in

a variety of contexts by enabling a more nuanced assessment as well as collaborative learning environments.

b. Kinds and Function of EFL Students' Gestures in Online Classroom

The researcher has analyzed the video recording of teaching process by Zoom cloud and found that students did not applied gestures in online EFL classroom.

Table 1.1 EFL Students' Gestures in Online Classroom

No	Gestures in online	Pseudonym									∑
		SN1	SN2	SN3	SN4	SN5	SN6	SN7	SN8	SN9	
1	speech-independent gestures										0
2	speech-related gestures										0

The study shown in Table 2 that there are speech-independent and speech-related gestures. No one students did gesture when they were given opportunity to speak in online classroom. Even though, they did gestures but those were not on screen (see figure 4.9).

As student 5, 6, and 9 stated in their interviews:

"saya biasa menggerakkan tangan saat bicara di online kelas bu, tapi mungkin tidak tertangkap kamera karena saya meletakkan tangan saya di atas meja. Sedangkan, yang nampak di layar cuma wajah sampai leher."

(Translation) "When I talk in an online class, mam, I usually move my hands. However, when I place my hands on the table, it might not be captured on camera, and all that is seen on the screen is my face up to my neck."

"mesti dalam lingkungan virtual, saya jarang pakai gesture biar tidak terganggu bu, saya selalu pegang pulpen supaya tidak terlalu tegang saat berbicara."

(Translation) "even though, it must take place in a virtual setting, ma'am. I never make gestures to avoid becoming distracted, and I always carry a pen to avoid becoming too tense when speaking.

"walaupun gesture dianggap penting, gesture atau gerakan kepala pada kelas online sebaiknya dipersiapkan juga oleh mahasiswa bu. Misalnya mahasiswa mempresentasikan materinya, kurangnya persiapan dan pemahaman terhadap materi

sehinggah menyebabkan mahasiswa harus membaca beberapa teks yang membuat pandangan dan gesture teralihkan.”

(Translation) “However, gesture is valued, ma'am, students should prepare their own gesture or head movements when taking online classes. For instance, when students present their content, their lack of preparation and comprehension forces them to read many passages, which detracts from their movements and looks.

Based on the above-mentioned interview results, it is possible that students are not concerned about framing. In order for the face and chest to be visible on the screen, this framing is crucial. Nonetheless, several of the people that the researchers discovered in the field had only a portion of their faces visible on the screen. The documentation that the researchers found in the field is listed on the next page, as shown in the circled image:
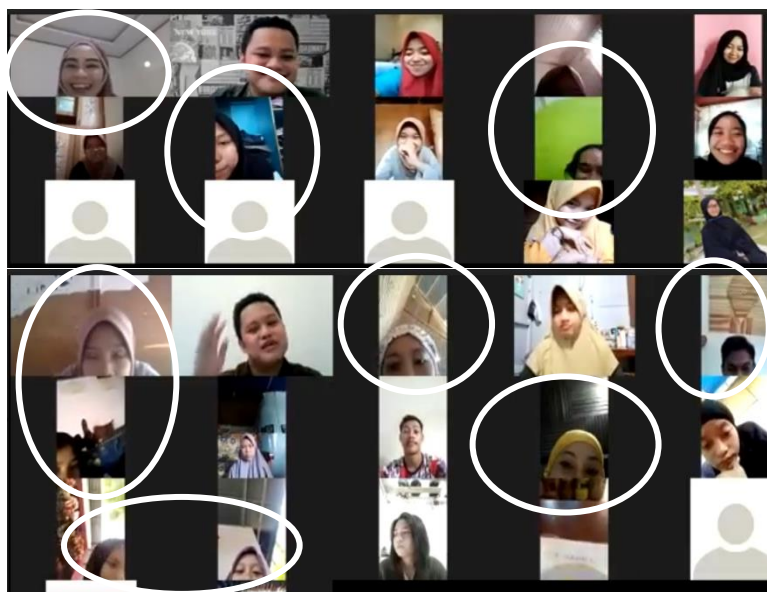

Figure 1.5. student’ unstable captured

The figure illustration shows a Zoom meeting platform-based virtual classroom. Several circles in the figure show that several students/ faces have been partially hidden on the screen, making it difficult to see their actions. According to what TW said in the interview, students are considered to be in Extreme Close-up (ECU) if their hand gestures are invisible.

4. Discussion

Based on experts who describe N-VC into several types. They are Mehrabian theory that consists of 3V (verbal, voice, and visual) and also Andersen (2005) there are 6 kinds of N-VC namely: proxemics, haptics, kinesics, vocalics, and to lesser extent, chronemics. Therefore, the researcher found some gestures in online EFL classroom.

Those are speech-independent gestures and speech-related gestures. Besides that, the researcher found that there is phenomenon that was not specifically described by those experts. It is close-up screen to object, which may be classified into two categories: Medium Close-Up (MCU) and Extreme Close-Up (ECU).

Based on the finding presented it can be found that there were some gestures in online EFL classroom at Universitas Sulawesi Barat. The teachers' gestures in online EFL classroom are speech-independent gestures and speech-related gestures. These strategies were applied every meeting in online EFL classroom as long as teacher' camera was on. All teachers' gestures were mostly complemented or reinforce their message when explaining the material.

According to Afdaliah (2022) stated that the effect of the teachers' gestures on students. She attained at least seven important points, as the following:

1. The students agree that some of teachers' hand gestures can help them to understand the material.
2. The students are easy to memorize vocabularies if the teacher illustrates them using hand gestures.
3. The students agreed that the teachers' gestures can help them to understand the instruction better.
4. The students feel appreciated if the teacher use gestures such as clapping hand, thumb up or nodded combined with smile as reward.
5. The students feel more appreciated when the teacher appoint them by using palm instead of index finger.
6. The students are scared, nervous and uncomfortable when the teacher reprimand them by hitting the table or whiteboard.
7. The students state that too many unnecessary hand movements can distract their focus on material.

The online classroom environment is the focus of this study, as opposed to point six of the previously cited statement, which highlights the offline classroom. Teachers frequently employ physical gestures, like tapping on a table or whiteboard, to get students' attention in traditional offline classrooms. However, online classes do not have such instances. Additionally, if the teachers can produce a good teaching media, they will be easy to teach and make the students enjoy the class without nervous and uncomfortable. Teachers can develop online learning process by using effective planning, preparing students, and enhancing interaction method in online learning process by using rich media and synchronous interaction. As the following figure:
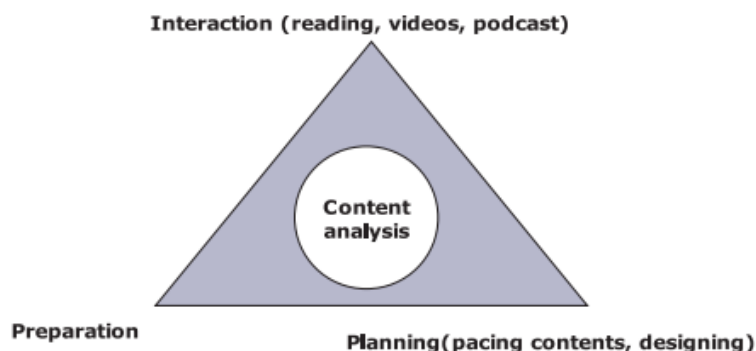
Figure 4.12. Effective online success factor taken from Maqableh et all (2022)

As an FKIP English student hoping to become a teacher, it is your responsibility to provide for varied entertainment demands of children today, which are not the same as those of the past. It is essential to begin preparing early by working with teachers to create instructional materials that are relevant to current trends. Furthermore, given that people in contemporary culture have shorter attention parts than those in earlier eras, it is imperative that teaching strategies be modified in order to effectively engage students and meet the demands of the modern classroom. As the following is the figure of online learning architecture and taken from Maqableh et al.
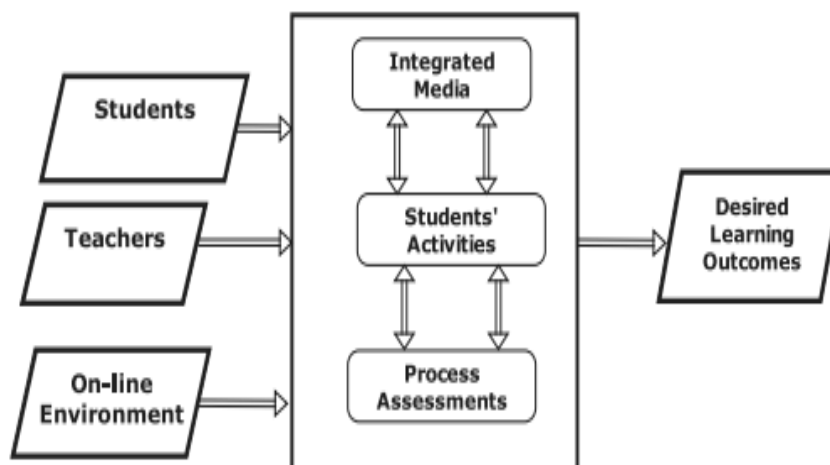

Figure 4.11 : online learning architecture (Maqableh et al. 2023)

Online classroom could be effective and successful if the some factors were integrated: Developing accessibility and autonomy between teachers and students, and developing the content of study materials to improve interaction between all study components. Collaboration can be modified through questions and assessments to extend the sociality of learning. Besides, the teachers can develop online materials by using rich media and synchronous interaction.

There are several ways to keep students interested in online classroom, and integrating humorous into the teaching strategy is one that works well. In the opinion of Wahyudi (2020), engaging students with entertainment goes further just making them laugh. It also includes analyzing how they respond and behave in response to the humor, as seen by their on-screen facial expressions. Thus, it become essential to stay visible on camera in order to properly monitor and interaction.

Different forms of entertainment can be appealing to everyone. While people find humor in being surprised by the truth, others take comport by completing just unsolved problems. There are also others who find amusement in learning more about their own characteristics and abilities.

In the context of online classroom, the need for enjoyment in relationships with others is still generally ignored. As a result, the psychological requirement for human communication are always changing. Future professionals must thoroughly prepare themselves in terms of information, insights, techniques, experiences, and skills in presenting in order to meet these requirements. As a result, conversations about these topics are inevitably linked to professional obligations. For example, teachers need to consider professional practices for teaching both offline and online classrooms.

Therefore, it is crucial that students learn how to apply N-VC strategies as early as possible when participating in classroom conversations, whether in offline and online context. When people can speak clearly and concisely in front of others, they usually have admirable traits. They are smart and make sure what they want to say before speaking.

Regarding, people should never undervalue the importance of N-VC strategy, no matter what their profession of work. In Indonesia, there are many psychologists, but only few of them-like Kak Seto and Tika Bisono – are well-known. In a similar vein, among many specialists, Prof. Johannes Surya, a well-known personality in physics education, stands out. This preferences stems from their extraordinary capacity to clearly and concisely convey their knowledge.

5. Conclusion

This study has successfully bridged the existing gap in understanding gestures within online EFL classrooms, specifically utilizing the Zoom platform. The comprehensive results presented a vivid picture of how foreign language learners and teachers engage with gestures. Through in-depth interviews with teachers, experts, and selected students, who exhibited a high level of gestures strategy application, and through detailed documentation, this study identified the various strategies employed by both teachers and students. The findings revealed that while both groups used gestures, teachers displayed a higher level of awareness and application compared to students.

However, students' gestures were invisible on the screen due to contraints of limited screenshots.

The impact of N-VC strategies in the online EFL classroom highlights their significance in enhancing communication and interaction. Notably, the study found that none of the data or components received exceptionally low ratings, indicating a generally positive perception of these strategies. This underscores the nuanced ways in which N-VC influences the dynamics of the online EFL classroom, highlighting its importance and the relatively favorable reception by both teachers and students.

Teachers and students adopted different approaches to implementing these strategies in the online classroom. Teachers varied significantly in their use of gestures, while students' use limited gestures but it is invisible. This differentiation in strategy use suggests the need approaches to maximize the effectiveness of gestures in online teaching environments.

The study's novelty lies in its focus on the online EFL classroom context, a relatively unexplored area in the field of language education research. By examining the specific strategies used in an online setting, this study provides new insights into the role of gestures in virtual learning environments. This is particularly relevant given the increasing reliance on online education due to recent global events, making the findings timely and applicable.

The implications of this study are far-reaching. For educators, understanding the importance of gestures can enhance teaching effectiveness and student engagement in online classrooms. The study suggests that teachers should be more creative in their teaching methods, integrating gestures strategies to complement verbal communication. This dual focus can help create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment, which is crucial for student motivation and participation.

For students, the study emphasizes the importance of being aware of their gestures and how these can impact their learning experience and interaction with teachers and peers. Students are encouraged to set up their learning environment to minimize distractions and maximize the visibility of their N-VC strategies, such as using medium close-up framing during online sessions.

Furthermore, the study's findings provide a foundation for the development of training programs aimed at improving N-VC skills among educators, specially gestures. By incorporating gestures into professional development programs, teachers can become more adept at using these techniques to enhance their online teaching effectiveness. This approach could also be extended to pre-service teacher education programs, ensuring that new teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in online learning environments.

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