

The Influence of Nonverbal Communication on Relationships

Ahairwe Frank

Faculty of Business Administration and Management Kampala International University Uganda

Email: ahairwefrank56@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Nonverbal communication constitutes a significant, often overlooked, aspect of human interaction. It transcends words, revealing emotional states, intentions, and social cues that are critical to relationship development, maintenance, and conflict resolution. This paper investigates the multifaceted role of nonverbal communication in different relationship contexts romantic, professional, therapeutic, and cross-cultural. Drawing from existing literature and empirical findings, it examines key nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, posture, proxemics, and vocal tone, emphasizing their psychological and social impacts. Special focus is placed on how nonverbal behaviors are perceived in educational settings and therapy, as well as how technology has reshaped the transmission and reception of these cues. The study highlights the dynamic, context-dependent nature of nonverbal communication and its capacity to either strengthen interpersonal bonds or generate misunderstandings. Ultimately, the research advocates for greater awareness and sensitivity to nonverbal signals to enhance communication effectiveness and relationship satisfaction.

Keywords: Nonverbal communication, body language, interpersonal relationships, proxemics, conflict resolution, cultural differences, educational interaction.

INTRODUCTION

Nonverbal behaviour is crucial to human communication, conveying messages without formal language. It manifests in three primary ways: absence of language, alternate language, and body language. Studies of body language show how bodily properties influence verbal communication, utilizing oral-motor gestures, tone, and environmental factors to contextualize language. Nonverbal communicators effectively share resources to adapt discourse based on their interpretation of context using various layers of recontextualization. These behaviours can differ among individuals, often shaped by cultural backgrounds. Awareness of nonverbal communication is essential in education, particularly within schools, involving all primary participants. Developing expertise requires informal training to enhance the nonverbal discourse in educational settings. The relationship between teachers and students is integral to the educational process. This study explores this dynamic, concentrating on how students perceive teachers' nonverbal behaviours, which they can leverage. Conversely, teachers influence students intentionally or unintentionally through their nonverbal actions. The study's goal is to increase teachers' awareness regarding their nonverbal behaviour [1, 2].

Understanding Nonverbal Communication

In their research, Canary and Stafford emphasize that "The Vitality of Relationships is Intrinsically Linked with the Communication within It." They highlight that couples communicating daily experience greater satisfaction, commitment, and love compared to those who do not. Effective communication involves sharing information, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal interaction. While verbal behavior is observable, nonverbal communication is subtle and often ambiguous, leading to its focus in this thesis. Knapp defines nonverbal communication as elements of communication beyond words, which can inform a variety of functions. It can provide information, regulate interaction, express intimacy, exercise social

control, and reflect one's social relationships. Studies suggest 65-93% of messages are conveyed nonverbally. Various components contribute to nonverbal behavior: artifacts (personal objects), proxemics (use of space), body language (movements and gestures), physical characteristics (appearance), clothing (social identity), and touching behavior (representing intimacy). Nonverbal cues can be more impactful than verbal expressions, conveying deep feelings through simple gestures like a look, smile, or frown. Silence can also hold significant meaning, just as sounds like laughter or moans can express emotions without words [3, 4].

The Role of Nonverbal Communication in Relationships

The associations and interactions between people are influenced by many factors. Nonverbal communication is an important factor that determines whether a relationship will develop, flourish, change, or be altered. It massively affects a person's behavior and provides insights into the individual's mental state, convictions, and intentions, revealing messages that do not conform to words. Nonverbal is universal and is perceived and understood on the subconscious level. During a conversation, there are distinctive nonverbal signals, including posture, gesture, eye contact, distance, and vocal tone. The placement and position of the body influence the conversations. With a variety of gestures, humans are able to give meaning to their words and thereby complete and even replace them. Eye contact, the movement of the eyeballs and eyelids in a conversation, provides information on the speaker's attention to the conversation and the partner. Distance is a factor that affects the degree of intimacy or closeness between individuals during their communication. While communicating, the differences in distance are perceived as intimate, friendly, engaged, and rude, and are not consciously controlled. Vocal tone reveals the speaker's true intention and characteristics of their speech. There is an enormous importance of nonverbal communication in relationships. It builds rapport between the parties involved and develops trust and a sense of belonging, which are vital ingredients for successful social interaction. First impressions are formed in seconds and are then acted upon. The building blocks of opinions about others take shape during initial encounters and are heavily influenced by non-verbal communication. The right posture, gestures, and eye contact ensure that a person is perceived as assertive and relaxed, while the wrong signals lead to dismissal and misunderstanding [5, 6].

Cultural Differences in Nonverbal Communication

In 1980, Knapp divided nonverbal communication (NVC) into five subcategories: paralinguistic cues, body movements, space and distance, touch, and appearance. In 2003, Burgoon added to the list environmental factors, artifacts. A few years later, Schroeder proposed co-presence as a nonverbal code of delivery. Each code reflects the culture in a different way and has its own particular characteristics in different areas. They work together to produce a complex and adequate communicative behavior to express and interpret a message. While a great deal of research has been devoted to understanding each nonverbal code separately, relatively fewer studies investigated the interaction or trade-offs between two or more codes in a communicative interaction. Due to the evolutionary aspect of NVC, all codes were relatively simple to begin with, but as time passed, each code grew more sophisticated and diverse independently in different geographical areas. Consequently, nations and cultures developed unique usages of each code. For example, some cultures avoid eye contact. Others may find avoiding eye contact disrespectful. A different level of personal space is maintained in various cultures. Bright colors may stand for fortune or happiness in some countries, while they may signify sadness in others. Display rules regarding touch are also culturally-dependent [7, 8].

Nonverbal Cues in Different Types of Relationships

Nonverbal communication is omnipresent in relationships. People tend to pick up on some nonverbal cues faster than others and clothe in content. Facial expressions, body language, gestures, and eye contact are all examples of nonverbal communication that can influence an individual's perception of an interaction. On the contrary, another nonverbal cue, space and how close individuals are to one another, can sometimes impact perception as well. This is referred to as proxemics or the physical distance between individuals. Nonverbal communication is important to how relationships are formed, maintained, and discarded. The implication of nonverbal cues is vast and is significant in both long-term and short-term relationships. Exploring ways to better understand nonverbal communication would better the quality of any type of interaction. This review looks at three types of relationships: stranger/first interaction, friend/close contact, and therapeutic/client interactions. The goal of each relationship perceptively is predictability, respect, and trust, respectively. Because of this perception, parties rely heavily on nonverbal cues to inform their understanding of their counterpart's attitudes, intentions, and emotions. Additionally, the entry to such relationships provides a unique perspective on nonverbal communication. Time spent with someone is often viewed as an investment in the future of that relationship. Each relationship type will first discuss the nature of the relationship and the way in which verbal and

nonverbal cues are exchanged. Then, there will be an examination of the implications of miscommunication in each type of relationship [9, 10].

The Impact of Nonverbal Communication on Conflict Resolution

Nonverbal Symbolism and Conflict Resolution studies the role of nonverbal communication in mitigating conflict. Research highlights essential nonverbal cues that promote positivity and ease tensions in interpersonal relationships. Key findings include that eyelid movement and eye elevation foster openness, while head-swaying actions help alleviate anger and frustration. Additionally, combining head movements with shoulder shrugs helps both calm disputes and establishes boundaries. Other strategies identified include absence and downgrading techniques in face-threatening situations and using nonverbal signals to enhance messages and reduce conflict. The study also addresses marriage dynamics, emphasizing that conflicts require effective management strategies. Confrontational and controlling behaviors can jeopardize relationships, while open communication and cooperative problem-solving foster marital harmony. Couples facing repeated conflicts often seek to strengthen their bond through mutual understanding and efforts to reduce egotism. Technological advancements have transformed couple communication, including telecommunication which adds complexity. In Taiwan, exploratory interviews reveal communication patterns during marital conflicts, identifying eight conflict stages. These behaviors aligned with conflict stages provided insight into ratios of communication scenarios. Suggestions for enhancing communication effectiveness are provided based on the unique attributes of each stage [11, 12].

The Influence of Technology on Nonverbal Communication

Research has shown that communication is more than just the spoken word, as it invariably involves nonverbal aspects such as body position, eye contact, appearances, posture, gestures, and expression. In an interview setting, this means that both the interviewee and the interviewer will display verbal and nonverbal communication, which may influence the interview experience itself, as well as its outcome and subsequent impressions. In particular, the introduction of technology into interviews could influence the interactions, outcomes, and perceptions, as the presence of technological devices may change the subjective interview experience considerably in comparison to the handwritten note-taking method typically used. For example, although electronic documentation arguably makes an interview more systematic and reliable in terms of a permanent record, it may also distance the interviewee from the interviewer, thereby preventing the opportunity for spontaneous comments and the display of thoughtful pauses. In order to explore the different ways that technology can constrain nonverbal aspects of communication, existing literature on the topic is examined. A review of research using both qualitative and quantitative methods highlights the fluctuating perspectives on technology within communication. The studies this research examines specifically assess how the introduction of technology affects perceptions of interactions following a medical interview. Some research has shown that electronic documentation improves accuracy and record-keeping, but it does not allow for the same interactional immediacy that handwritten notes do. In another study, patients formed more negative perceptions of doctors who took notes during the interactions. These studies have been essential to understanding the importance of nonverbal aspects of communication, as well as what components thereof are less effective when involving technology [13, 14].

Nonverbal Communication in Therapy and Counseling

In therapy and counseling, nonverbal communication significantly affects client functioning within a supportive environment. The counselor-client relationship is crucial, with both parties rating perceptions of nonverbal cues and their rapport. Counselors must utilize a variety of knowledge and skills to enhance effectiveness, including understanding nonverbal communication. Nonverbal immediacy, which includes behaviors like smiling and eye contact, aims to reduce distance and foster closeness, improving communication and client outcomes. This immediacy acts as a strong indicator of the counselor-client relationship quality, often leading to enhanced discussions of challenging topics. The therapeutic alliance, characterized by a partnership toward shared goals and emotional connection, is vital for successful therapy. A quantitative observational study developed a coding scheme to identify nonverbal cues in sessions. Analyzing videotaped sessions revealed that counselors' recognition of nonverbal cues is linked to clients' perceptions of therapeutic alliance, often predicting positive outcomes. The study involved preparing video/audio materials and selecting 48 sessions for analysis, assisting with coder training. Clients who felt dissatisfied with nonverbal communication reported a weaker therapeutic alliance, while therapists who recognized nonverbal expressions showed improved satisfaction scores on the Working Alliance Inventory Test [15, 16].

Research Methods in Studying Nonverbal Communication

In an effort to better understand nonverbal communication methods, this study presents research on essential aspects of nonverbal communication, including both subtle and overt forms. The study is grounded in two distinct interpretations of nonverbal communication: 1) nonverbal codes that send out high levels of perceived intimacy may also send out high levels of perceived uncertainty, 2) nonverbal communication is a fundamental aspect of perception management. Consequently, a mixed-methods approach is used to measure six nonverbal communication aspects, including: 1. Physical appearance; 2. Proximity; 3. Eye contact; 4. Tone of voice; 5. Posture, gestures, and body orientation; and 6. Touch. This approach is warranted comprehension-wise because these aspects not only promote a better theoretical understanding of nonverbal communication, but also qualitative exploration of their role on perceived teacher performance. Videotaped segments of two classes are used so that participants may rate their performance on a questionnaire designed to measure the six aforementioned aspects. In-depth interviews are also conducted with six participants from the quantitative analysis to gain deeper insight on the nonverbal aspects that participants perceive to be most influential. The discussion is divided into six subsections, one for each nonverbal aspect, which includes the quantitative data and in-depth reflection from the qualitative data. Depending on the importance of an aspect, we shall incorporate participant quotes to support the results. Discussion of results and theoretical implications that stem from interview loneliness are presented in the final section [17, 18].

Future Trends in Nonverbal Communication Research

More than 50 years ago, academic interest in nonverbal communication increased dramatically and has become a mature subfield impacting other areas within social sciences. However, future research directions can focus on the interplay among the fields of interpersonal human-nature communication, and the role of feelings and bodily sensations similar to emotion in nonverbal communication. Individuals experienced in sending and receiving nonverbal communication such as looks in their interpersonal interactions reported different experiences using nonverbal forms of communication on social media. Similarly, research on the perception of nonverbal signals and cues can be broadened beyond humans and social media, applying and testing it with nonverbal communication of other creatures, such as dogs or monkeys. Research on nonverbal communication in nonhumans, such as animals, could gain even more public attention to use the findings to understand and protect the environment. More than defining the origin of perception, bodily sensations may gain more attention in the understanding of nonverbal communication than verbal messages and emotions. Virtual reality also provides a useful experimental paradigm to advance this research direction [19, 20].

Practical Applications of Nonverbal Communication Skills

Nonverbal communication significantly influences human interactions, making it essential for both personal and professional relationships. It comprises two-thirds of all communication, emphasizing the need to be aware of nonverbal messages. To enhance these skills, one should observe and interpret body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Employing "I" statements can prevent defensive reactions. When conveying good news, fostering a positive atmosphere with enthusiasm is beneficial, while addressing bad news requires acknowledging emotions and being sincere to reduce defensiveness. Open body language can reassure an anxious audience and promote collaboration. Ending business meetings on a positive note and expressing gratitude nonverbally can preserve supportive communication for future interactions. In ESL/EFL, nonverbal features heavily impact classroom communication, yet this area has often been overlooked. Nonverbal signals like gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact are crucial for interpreting messages. Gestures serve three main purposes: they can illustrate concrete information, enhance speech flow, and reflect emotional responses, indicating the speaker's cognitive state. Such nonverbal cues can enhance student participation, facilitating deeper processing in language learning and signaling teacher perceptions through increased engagement [21, 22].

CONCLUSION

Nonverbal communication is a powerful yet subtle force that shapes the quality, depth, and outcome of human relationships. From the initial formation of impressions to the sustained dynamics of intimacy and trust, it complements and often supersedes verbal exchanges. Cultural context, relational setting, and technological mediums all mediate how nonverbal cues are produced and interpreted. Misinterpretations of these cues can hinder understanding, while conscious awareness can enhance empathy and rapport. In education and therapy, where relational depth is essential, nonverbal behaviors serve as critical tools for building supportive environments. As society becomes increasingly reliant on digital communication, recognizing and preserving nonverbal richness is essential. Understanding the nuances of nonverbal interaction not only empowers individuals in personal relationships but also enriches professional, educational, and cross-cultural communication.

REFERENCES

1. Rhodes JM. Nutrition and gut health: the impact of specific dietary components—it's not just five-a-day. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*. 2021 Feb;80(1):9-18.
2. Hall JA, Knapp ML, editors. *Nonverbal communication*. Walter de Gruyter; 2013 Jan 30.
3. Wiley AR. Connecting as a couple: Communication skills for healthy relationships. In *The Forum for Family and Consumer Issues* 2007 (Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 1-9).
4. Zand S, Baradaran M, Najafi R, Maleki A, Golbazi Mahdipour A. Culture and Gender in nonverbal communication. *Rooyesh-e-Ravanshenasi Journal (RRJ)*. 2020 Feb 10;8(12):123-30.
5. Thiele AH, Musolino GM, Masin HL. Mindful Matters: Communication to Establish Rapport. In *Davis's Patient-Practitioner Interaction* (pp. 237-256). Routledge. [\[HTML\]](#)
6. Nadia R, Syam AM. THE ROLE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN IMPROVING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE. *International Journal of Cultural and Social Science*. 2025 May 5;6(1):72-82. [pcijournal.org](#)
7. Martín-Raugh MP, Kell HJ, Randall JG, Anguiano-Carrasco C, Banfi JT. Speaking without words: A meta-analysis of over 70 years of research on the power of nonverbal cues in job interviews. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. 2023 Jan;44(1):132-56. [\[HTML\]](#)
8. Nguyen N. THE IMPACTS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION ON EFL STUDENTS'SPEAKING PERFORMANCE IN VIETNAMESE CLASSROOM. *SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL OF TAN TRAO UNIVERSITY*. 2024;10(3).
9. Farsani D, Rodrigues J. Proxemic and nonverbal communication in classroom interaction. *Psicologia Escolar e Educacional*. 2021 Dec 6;25:e229866.
10. Ahmed A, Faheem A, Batool R. Cross-cultural nonverbal communication dynamics: decoding the subtle language of culture. *Policy Research Journal*. 2024;2(4):221-35.
11. Sopyanti L, Tahir M, Amin FH. INVESTIGATING NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH PRESENTATIONS AT EFL CLASSROOMS. *KLASIKAL: JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, LANGUAGE TEACHING AND SCIENCE*. 2025 Apr 5;7(1):212-28. [journal.fkip.universitاسbosowa.org](#)
12. Jo S, Shim SW. Paradigm shift of employee communication: The effect of management communication on trusting relationships. *Public relations review*. 2005 Jun 1;31(2):277-80.
13. Xenakis I, Gavalas D, Kasapakis V, Dzardanova E, Vosinakis S. Nonverbal communication in immersive virtual reality through the lens of presence: a critical review. *PRESENCE: Virtual and Augmented Reality*. 2022 Dec 1;31:147-87. [researchgate.net](#)
14. Givens DB. Nonverbal neurology: How the brain encodes and decodes wordless signs, signals, and cues. In *The social psychology of nonverbal communication* 2014 Nov 25 (pp. 9-30). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
15. Bender EN, Savundranayagam MY, Murray L, Orange JB. Supportive strategies for nonverbal communication with persons living with dementia: A scoping review. *International journal of nursing studies*. 2022 Dec 1;136:104365. [\[HTML\]](#)
16. Wanko Keutchafo EL, Kerr J, Baloyi OB. A model for effective nonverbal communication between nurses and older patients: a grounded theory inquiry. In *Healthcare* 2022 Oct 22 (Vol. 10, No. 11, p. 2119). MDPI.
17. Urakami J, Seaborn K. Nonverbal cues in human–robot interaction: A communication studies perspective. *ACM Transactions on Human-Robot Interaction*. 2023 Mar 15;12(2):1-21.
18. Lin T, Anderson T. Reduced therapeutic skill in teletherapy versus in-person therapy: The role of non-verbal communication. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*. 2024 Mar;24(1):317-27.
19. Yuan L. EFL teacher-student interaction, teacher immediacy, and Students' academic engagement in the Chinese higher learning context. *Acta Psychologica*. 2024 Apr 1;244(11):1-0.
20. Noël R, Miranda D, Cechinel C, Riquelme F, Primo TT, Munoz R. Visualizing collaboration in teamwork: A multimodal learning analytics platform for non-verbal communication. *Applied Sciences*. 2022 Jul 26;12(15):7499. [mdpi.com](#)
21. Warren CA. Towards a pedagogy for the application of empathy in culturally diverse classrooms. *The Urban Review*. 2014 Sep;46(3):395-419.
22. Warren CA. Towards a pedagogy for the application of empathy in culturally diverse classrooms. *The Urban Review*. 2014 Sep;46(3):395-419.

CITE AS Ahairwe Frank (2025). The Influence of Nonverbal Communication on Relationships. IDOSR JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES 11(3):73-78.
<https://doi.org/10.59298/IDOSRJAH/2025/1137378>