

## The Power of Body Language in Education: A Study of Teachers' Perceptions

Turgay Kucuk<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Language Teaching Department, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University, Erbil, Iraq

Correspondence: Turgay Kucuk, English Language Teaching Department, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University, Erbil, Iraq.

Email: turgay.kucuk@tiu.edu.iq

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to shed light on the significance of body language in education and gather instructor opinions on the matter. Throughout the study, we looked at the background of body language, touched on its significance in education, and highlighted the cultural differences in it. The most typical body language errors were listed in order to provide advice to teachers, and in this situation, efficient body language approaches were suggested. A Google Form questionnaire was used to gather the opinions of 30 instructors at Tishk University, a private university in Iraq, on this topic, and teachers were subsequently subjected to in-person interviews. The analysis of the questionnaire and the interview revealed that the teachers' judgments of body language were significant and that it improved the standard of instruction. It's surprising to note that none of the 30 teachers who took part in the study expressed a negative view of body language; on the contrary, it was found that they were eager to learn more about it.

**Keywords:** Body Language, Nonverbal Language, Teachers' Perceptions, Gestures

### 1. Introduction

The impact of body language extends well beyond interpersonal and social interactions. It has become increasingly apparent that body language has a substantial impact on both teaching and learning processes in education. Body language in education refers to the nonverbal signs that teachers and students utilize during the teaching and learning process to transmit information and express feelings. Nonverbal indicators such as facial expressions, body language, and posture can impact the overall efficacy of the teaching and learning process (Abubakr et al., 2022; Küçük, 2023a)

Many tasks can be served by body language in the context of education. First, it can aid in establishing a positive classroom atmosphere. Instructors whose body language is favorable can create a pleasant and inviting learning atmosphere, which can increase student engagement and motivation (Feldman et al., 1997). Second, body language can facilitate communication between students and teachers. Instructors who are aware of their nonverbal cues can use them to communicate with their pupils more effectively, leading to enhanced learning outcomes (Pekrun et al., 2009).

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Lastly, body language can contribute to the development of a sense of community in the classroom. By employing proper nonverbal cues, teachers can build a sense of community among their pupils, which can have a good effect on academic attainment (Walton & Cohen, 2011).

There are a number of crucial body language components that are especially pertinent to schooling. Facial expressions are one of the most significant nonverbal indicators in education since they can transmit a variety of emotions, such as interest, boredom, and perplexity. A teacher who smiles and keeps eye contact with their pupils, for instance, can create a positive and welcoming environment, whereas a teacher who appears bored or indifferent may unwittingly inhibit student engagement (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992). Gestures are also important in teaching because they can reinforce spoken messages and make abstract topics more tangible. Instructors who employ gestures can enhance their students' comprehension and retention of material (Cook et al., 2012; Küçük, 2023b). In education, posture is an essential component of body language since it conveys confidence, authority, and openness. Instructors who keep an open and relaxed posture can facilitate more effective classroom discussions by making their students feel more at ease (Cohen & Steele, 2002).

Many studies have been done on how body language affects learning and teaching, and the results show that it has a significant impact. In one study, researchers found that students viewed teachers with more positive body language as more successful, and their pupils reported higher levels of course satisfaction (Caswell & Neill, 2003). Another study indicated that students' test results improved when teachers utilized more gestures in the classroom (Cook et al., 2012). In addition, research has demonstrated that when students are aware of their own and their peers' body language, they can improve their communication skills and social interactions (Müller et al., 2013).

Body language has a significant impact on both the teaching and learning processes in education. Nonverbal cues, including as facial expressions, gestures, and posture, might affect student engagement, comprehension, and retention. Teachers who are aware of and make efficient use of their body language can establish a positive and inviting classroom environment, communicate more effectively with their pupils, and promote a feeling of community among their students. So, it is crucial for educators to comprehend the function of body language in education and exploit it to their advantage (Dillon & Gabbard, 1998).

## **2. The Background of Body Language**

Since ancient times, body language, often known as nonverbal communication, has been a vital aspect of human communication. It is the non-verbal communication of messages and emotions through the use of bodily gestures, postures, facial expressions, and eye movements. The study of body language is a fundamental part of human interaction, and it has been utilized in numerous sectors, including education, psychology, and sociology (Masségia, 2015).

The history of body language dates back to ancient civilizations such as Egypt, where hieroglyphics represented movements and stances that transmitted various meanings. Actors and orators relied largely on physical gestures to convey emotions and meanings in ancient Greek and Roman plays and speeches.

In courtrooms during the Middle Ages, judges frequently relied on the accused's gestures and postures to decide guilt or innocence (Müller et al., 2013).

In the early 20th century, academics such as Charles Darwin, who wrote extensively on the subject in his book *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, brought substantial attention to the study of body language. His insights impacted subsequent researchers on the subject.

Education has been one of the most prominent applications of body language research. Teachers employ nonverbal communication to create a positive learning environment, build connections with students, and transmit vital messages in the classroom. According to a study done by Zeki (2009), teachers that employ more nonverbal clues in the classroom, such as eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions, had greater student involvement and improved academic performance.

Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia (2014) discovered in a more recent study that teacher enthusiasm, which is transmitted by nonverbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures, had a significant impact on student motivation and engagement. The study indicates that nonverbal communication has a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviors of students in the classroom.

In psychology, particularly in the field of emotion identification, body language has also been widely investigated. Nonverbal clues, such as facial expressions and body posture, are crucial for effectively understanding the emotions of people, according to research. A study by Matsumoto and Hwang (2016) revealed that people from many cultures use similar nonverbal cues to describe their emotions, suggesting that certain components of body language are universal.

Recent technological advancements have led to the development of automated systems that understand and respond to human emotions by analyzing body language. For instance, Sariyanidi et al. (2014) created an emotion identification system that uses machine learning algorithms to assess facial expressions and body language in real-time. The algorithm was able to effectively identify and respond to human emotions, revealing the promise of body language analysis in a variety of applications.

The training of nonverbal communication skills is a second method body language has been utilized in education. Students are taught how to read and interpret body language, which enables them to comprehend social cues and build superior communication skills (Knapp et al., 2013). It has been determined that these activities are successful at enhancing pupils' social skills and self-confidence.

Positive reinforcement is one method via which body language has been incorporated into education. Instructors have been instructed to utilize positive body language, such as smiling, nodding, and maintaining eye contact, to reward excellent conduct and academic performance. It has been demonstrated that this method increases student involvement and motivation (Wen et al., 2021). Moreover, teachers have been encouraged to adopt open body language, such as uncrossed arms and legs, to convey approachability and foster a more friendly classroom climate.

The study of body language has a long and illustrious history, with origins in ancient civilizations. It remains a key subject of research in numerous disciplines, including education, psychology, and sociology. A recent study has revealed the significance of nonverbal communication in influencing human behavior

and emotions, underlining the necessity for continuous research and development in this area (Leathers & Eaves, 2015).

### **3. The Importance of Body Language in Education**

Body language is a crucial aspect of communication in the educational setting. Research has shown that nonverbal cues account for a significant portion of our communication, with body language being a key component (Andersen et al., 2013). In the context of education, body language plays an important role in conveying messages, expressing emotions, and building relationships between teachers and students.

One of the key benefits of using body language in education is that it can help to improve communication and understanding between teachers and students. For example, a teacher who uses positive body language, such as smiling and making eye contact, can convey a sense of warmth and openness to students, which can help to build trust and rapport. Similarly, students who use positive body language, such as sitting up straight and making eye contact, can show that they are engaged and interested in the lesson (Dörnyei & Griffiee, 2010).

Another benefit of using body language in education is that it can help to improve classroom management and discipline. For example, teachers who use positive body language, such as standing up straight and maintaining eye contact, can convey a sense of authority and control, which can help to prevent disruptive behavior (Avalos, 2011). Similarly, students who use positive body language, such as nodding and making eye contact, can show that they are attentive and respectful to the teacher (Wei & Chen, 2012).

Body language can also help to improve the learning experience for students. For example, research has shown that teachers who use positive body language, such as making eye contact and using gestures, can improve student engagement and motivation (Pekrun & Marsh, 2022). Additionally, students who use positive body language, such as nodding and making eye contact, can show that they are receptive to the material being taught (Wang et al., 2023).

### **4. The Basics of Body Language**

In the educational setting, body language is a vital component of communication. According to research, nonverbal clues account for a major percentage of our communication, with body language playing a central role (Andersen et al., 2013). In the context of education, body language is crucial for transmitting messages, expressing emotions, and establishing rapport between teachers and pupils.

The ability to improve communication and comprehension between teachers and students is one of the primary benefits of employing body language in education. For instance, a teacher who employs positive body language, such as smiling and making eye contact, can project a sense of warmth and openness to his or her students, which can aid in establishing trust and rapport. Students who employ positive body language, such as sitting up straight and making eye contact, can demonstrate engagement and interest in the lecture (Dornei & Griffiee, 2010).

The use of body language in education can also improve classroom discipline and administration. Teachers who utilize positive body language, such as standing up straight and maintaining eye contact, can convey

a sense of authority and control, so preventing disruptive behavior (Avalos, 2011). Similarly, pupils who use positive body language, such as nodding and making eye contact, can demonstrate respect and attentiveness to the teacher (Wei & Chen, 2012).

Moreover, body language can enhance the learning experience for students. For instance, studies have demonstrated that teachers who use positive body language, such as making eye contact and employing gestures, can increase student engagement and motivation (Pekrun & Marsh, 2022; Soran & Kara, 2022). Furthermore, pupils who exhibit good body language, like as nodding and making eye contact, might demonstrate that they are receptive to the taught subject (Wang et al., 2023).

## **5. Cultural Differences in Body Language**

The expression of emotions, thoughts, and attitudes is greatly influenced by body language, which is a crucial aspect of communication. Yet, cultural differences in the use of body language can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. In recent years, research has focused on cultural differences in body language; this paper will describe some of the most notable findings.

Eye contact is one of the most significant variations in cross-cultural body language. In Western societies, eye contact is frequently interpreted as an indication of confidence and sincerity, whereas in many Eastern cultures, avoiding eye contact is a gesture of respect and humility (Knapp et al., 2011). Thus, Westerners may view Easterners as dishonest or untrustworthy, whereas Easterners may view Westerners as aggressive or confrontational.

Another distinction is the use of physical contact. In many Western cultures, physical touches, such as a handshake or embrace, are frequent forms of greeting. Yet, in some cultures, such as those in Asia and the Middle East, physical contact between people of different sexes is frowned upon or even forbidden (Pawiak, 2016; Küçük, 2023c). This might result in embarrassing or unpleasant circumstances for those unfamiliar with certain cultural standards.

Another area where cultural disparities in body language are evident is facial expressions. A smile, for instance, is commonly regarded as a universal sign of enjoyment or friendship. However, in some cultures, such as Russia and China, a smile may be viewed as insincerity or disdain (Matsumoto, 2006). This can result in confusion and miscommunication, especially in cross-cultural interactions.

Education is vital in assisting individuals to manage cultural variances in body language. By exposing individuals to several cultures and teaching them about cultural norms and expectations, education can aid in the development of the skills required for effective cross-cultural communication. This can be especially helpful for those who work in multicultural environments or regularly travel (Küçük, 2023d).

Cultural differences in body language are a crucial and intricate element of communication. Knowing these distinctions can be essential for avoiding misunderstandings and fostering effective cross-cultural connections. Education is crucial to the development of these skills and should be a top priority for those who work in multicultural contexts or have regular contact with people of different cultures.

## **6. Common Body Language Mistakes**

Body language is a nonverbal communication that plays a crucial role in how we perceive and are perceived by others. It is particularly important in educational settings such as the classroom, where it can impact the success of both teachers and students. However, there are common body language mistakes that are often made by both teachers and students, including crossing arms, avoiding eye contact, and fidgeting. In this article, we will discuss these common mistakes and provide tips for avoiding them, drawing on research from the last 20 years.

### **6.1 Crossing Arms**

Crossing arms is a common body language mistake that is often perceived as a defensive posture. This can create a negative impression and make it difficult for others to engage with you. A study by Hall et al. (2005) found that crossing arms was perceived as more negative than other forms of body language, such as fidgeting or looking away.

### **6.2 Avoiding Eye Contact**

Avoiding eye contact is another common mistake that can negatively impact communication. It can make a person appear disinterested or untrustworthy. Research by Niederhoffer and Pennebaker (2002) found that avoiding eye contact was associated with lower levels of trust and likability in job interviews.

### **6.3 Fidgeting**

Fidgeting is a common nervous habit that can be distracting to others. It can also make you appear less confident and competent. A study by Leary et al. (1988) found that fidgeting was associated with lower levels of social dominance and likability.

### **6.4 Standing Too Close**

Standing too close to someone can create a sense of discomfort or even intimidation. This can be especially problematic in educational settings where teachers and students are often in close proximity. A study by Wahyuni (2018) found that standing too close was perceived as more negative than other forms of body language, such as looking away or crossing arms.

### **6.5 Slouching**

Slouching can make a person appear disengaged or uninterested. It can also impact the way that you breathe, making it more difficult to project your voice and communicate effectively. Research Goodwin et al. (2014) found that sitting up straight with your shoulders back can improve confidence and performance.

### **6.6 Frowning**

Frowning is a common facial expression that can be perceived as negative or unfriendly. It can also impact the way that others perceive your mood and emotions. Research by Ekman and Friesen (2003) has shown

that facial expressions are a universal language, and that frowning is generally associated with negative emotions.

### **6.7 Touching Your Face**

Touching your face can be a distracting habit that can make you appear unprofessional or even untrustworthy. A study by LaBelle et al. (2013) found that touching your face was associated with lower levels of credibility in job interviews.

### **6.8 Playing with Hair**

Playing with hair is another common habit that can be distracting to others. It can also be perceived as a sign of nervousness or lack of confidence. Research by Sciarra et al. (2022) found that hair-touching was associated with lower levels of social competence.

## **7. Some Techniques of Body Language that Teachers Can Use in Lessons**

### **7.1 Maintain Eye Contact**

Eye contact is an essential component of nonverbal communication, conveying confidence, attention, and respect. Instructors can develop a connection with their pupils and demonstrate their interest in the course by making eye contact (Haataja et al., 2021).

### **7.2 Use Gestures**

Gestures can enhance verbal communication by highlighting key ideas. Instructors can utilize gestures to show passion and enhance the engagement of their lessons (Valenzeno et al., 2003).

### **7.3 Use facial Expressions**

Expressions on the face can reflect a variety of emotions, including happiness, sadness, and rage. Instructors can utilize facial expressions to indicate when pupils need to pay attention and to convey their passion for the subject matter (Ekman, 1992).

### **7.4 Use open Body Language**

Open body languages, such as facing the kids squarely and without crossing the arms or legs, can communicate approachability and openness. Teachers can establish a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment by using open body language (Benzer, 2012).

### **7.5 Use Appropriate Touch**

A touch on the back or a handshake can show warmth and closeness. Instructors can utilize appropriate touch to establish relationships with pupils and reinforce good behavior (Deuchar, 2013).



## 7.6 Use Space Effectively

Many meanings can be conveyed through the utilization of space in the classroom, such as standing near a student to indicate intimacy or standing far away to convey respect. Instructors may create a comfortable and interesting learning environment by utilizing space properly (Fast, 1970).

## 7.7 Mirror Students' Body Language

Replicating students' body language, such as crossing one's legs when another student crosses theirs, can aid in establishing rapport and a connection with classmates (Baynton, 1996).

## 8. Methodology

In this study, a mixed method was used to evaluate the teachers' opinions and the collected data. A questionnaire consisting of 7 questions was prepared via Google Forms to get the teachers' opinions on Body Language. In the second stage, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the teachers, and their opinions were noted.

### 8.1 Aim of the Research

The purpose of this study is to get the opinions of teachers about body language, to examine the studies done in this field, to emphasize the importance of nonverbal communication in education, to offer useful techniques in this regard, and the main purpose is to emphasize the role of body language in education.

### 8.2 Participants

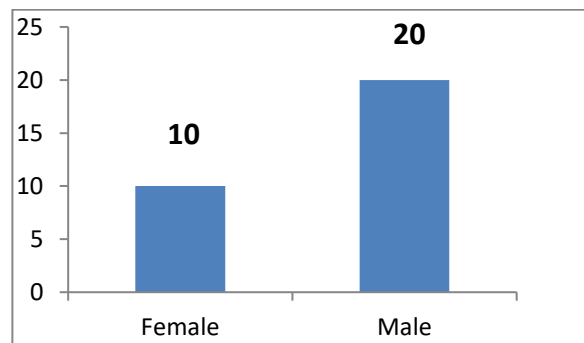


Figure 1: Gender percentage of participants

A total of 30 teachers, 10 female 33%, and 20 male 67% from Tishk International University in Iraq, and Stirling Education Company participated in this study.



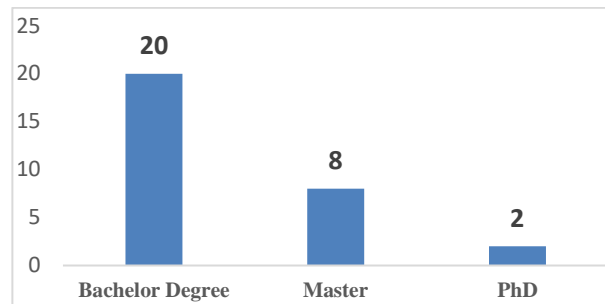


Figure 2: Education level of the participants

Teachers from different education levels participated in the study. 20 teachers attended 66% bachelor's Degrees, 8 teachers 27% Master's Degrees, and 2 teachers 7% Ph.D.

### 8.3 Data Collection

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were used to evaluate teachers' views and analyze the data obtained. On Google Forms, 7 statements are given to get teachers' views on Body Language. In the second stage, face-to-face interviews were made with the teachers, and their opinions on Nonverbal Language were taken.

### 9. Findings

Two basic approaches were used to collect the data for this section: a questionnaire and an in-person interview. In light of this, each item has been separately evaluated, as described below.

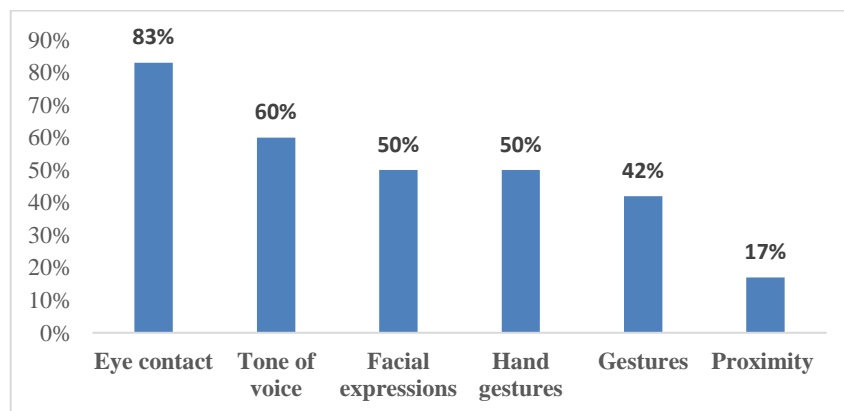


Figure 3: Which of the following examples of body language used in the classroom by teachers do you think is the most important?

Participants were asked, as indicated in the table above, which of the body language options teachers utilize is more important. To avoid limiting participants to a single option, the ability to select multiple options was granted. It is evident from the table, 83% of teachers reported making eye contact with students. Second, 60% of the teachers' tones were chosen. The hand and facial expressions of teachers placed third with a rate of 50%. Other options were selected at a rate lower than fifty percent.

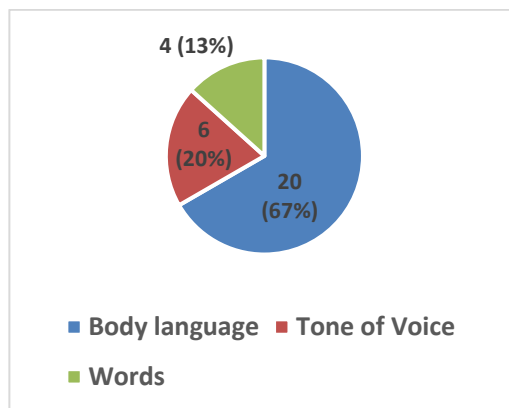


Figure 4: What do you believe captures the attention of students or draws their focus more?

The participants were asked the question, "What attracts the students' attention the most during the lesson," and 3 options were presented. Twenty of the teachers who participated in the study and from different education levels stated that it is the body language that teachers use with a rate of 67%. 6 participants 20% reported the teachers' tone of voice, 4 teachers 13% reported the words used by the teachers.

Table 1: Teachers' opinions on body language

ITEMS	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. Do you think that you use body language in your lessons?	16	53	14	47	0	0	0	0
2. I believe that body language plays an important role in effective teaching and try to continuously improve my own nonverbal communication skills.	20	67	10	33	0	0	0	0
3. I am open to feedback about my body language and willing to make adjustments to improve my communication with students.	15	50	15	50	0	0	0	0
4. I make an effort to maintain eye contact with my students during conversations.	20	67	10	33	0	0	0	0
5. Effective body language can help teachers manage their classrooms and promote positive behavior.	25	83	5	17	0	0	0	0

In the above table, 30 teachers were presented with 5 statements about body language via Google Forms. The detailed analysis of these statements is as follows.

In item 1 to the teachers, "Do you think that you use body language in your lessons"? the question was asked. 16 participants chose 53% strongly agree option. Of the 14 participants, 47% chose the option to agree. No one chose any of the negative options. The data obtained shows us that all of the teachers participating in the study use body language in their classes.

In item 2 to the participants, "I believe that body language plays an important role in effective teaching and try to continuously improve my own nonverbal communication skills" a statement was presented. 20 teachers, 67% strongly agree, and 10 teachers 33% agree. This emerging data shows us the fact that all of the teachers participating in the study think that body language is an effective element in education, and they work to improve their body language skills.

In item 3, the statement "I am open to feedback about my body language and willing to make adjustments to improve my communication with students" was addressed. 15, 50% of the participants chose strongly agree, and the other 15, 50% agreed. Since there is no one who determines the disagree options, we find that the teachers participating in the study are open to criticism and are willing to improve themselves.

In item 4, the statement "I make an effort to maintain eye contact with my students during conversations" was presented to the teachers. All of the teachers gave positive feedback on this issue. This data shows us how important eye contact with students is in lessons and that teachers are aware of this ability.

In item 5 teachers were presented with the statement "Effective body language can help teachers manage their classrooms and promote positive behavior". 25 out of 30 participants chose the strongly agree option and clearly demonstrated how important body language is in education. No one gave a negative answer to this statement.

### **9.1 The Analysis of the Interview**

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 30 teachers and 5 of the participants' views were taken as lack of place in the study. The efficiency of the data obtained through face-to-face interviews is increasing (Loosveldt, 2012). The answers given by the teachers are as follows.

Body language is an essential component of effective classroom communication. As a teacher, I use facial expressions and body language to convey my enthusiasm and interest in the subject matter. This contributes to the creation of a good and engaging learning environment that fosters student participation and enhances their ability to learn. (Teacher 1)

In my experience, body language can frequently convey meaning and emotion more effectively than words. By employing appropriate body language, hand gestures, and facial emotions, I am able to convey difficult ideas and concepts to my pupils in a manner that resonates with them and makes the lesson more memorable. (Teacher 8)

When interacting with pupils who are struggling or suffering emotional challenges, body language is crucial. By utilizing a warm and empathic tone, maintaining eye contact, and employing proper facial

expressions and gestures, I can establish a secure and supportive environment in which students feel at ease sharing their concerns and requesting assistance. (Teacher 14)

As a language instructor, I largely rely on nonverbal communication to assist my pupils to comprehend new vocabulary and concepts. By the use of exaggerated facial expressions and movements, I can assist students in associating new words with their meanings, which can be especially beneficial for visual and kinesthetic learners. (Teacher 16)

Body language is a vital technique for maintaining discipline and order in the classroom. By employing suitable postures and gestures, I may indicate to kids when they must pay attention, when they are being disruptive, and when they must be silent. This contributes to the creation of a disciplined and concentrated learning environment favorable to academic performance. (Teacher 19)

## 10. Conclusion

The use of body language by teachers and educators is essential. A teacher who doesn't employ body language cannot effectively instruct their students, just as a ship without sails cannot go ahead in the sea as it wishes.

In this study, we attempted to demonstrate the significance of body language in teaching through the use of evidence. It is clear that body language is important in teaching based on the results of the questionnaire and teacher interviews. Instructors communicate with their pupils through body language to transmit feelings, attitudes, and intentions. They convey messages, define concepts, and reaffirm ideas via gestures, facial expressions, and posture. According to the findings, teachers who have a good relationship with their students are more likely to have their students be engaged and motivated in class. Furthermore, pupils perceive unapproachable, distant, and uninterested professors who slouch, cross their arms, avoid eye contact, or otherwise display unfavorable body language. Body language can also be used to gauge how pupils are feeling and how well they comprehend the material. Instructors can tell from a student's body language if they are confused, interested, or bored. In order to guarantee that all students are given the essential support and encouragement they need to succeed, they can use this information to modify their teaching tactics.

Overall, the findings of this study show that using body language effectively in the classroom is essential. Teachers must be conscious of their body language and employ it to convey positive attitudes and feelings to their students. Teachers can accomplish this by fostering a favorable learning atmosphere in the classroom.

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