

The Role of Body Language in Language Learning

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¹Received: 27/05/2025; Accepted: 19/07/2025; Published: 08/08/2025

Abstract

Undeniably, language is the most important means of communication and it can be simply defined as a sign system, specially the customary sign system of humankind. Communication can be of varied forms; each form is valuable. It takes place not only by words (verbal communication) but also through other channels especially for deaf people and who have a hearing impairment. This includes the available sensory modes (hearing, sight, etc) to cover facial expressions, gestures and body language, features referred to as non-verbal communication. This research focuses on this form. The aim of the research is to find out to what extent the role of body language in language learning.

1. Section one: The Problem and Its Significant

1.1 Introductory Note

Language is the capacity to obtain and utilize complex frameworks of communication, especially the human capacity to do as such, and a language is a particular case of such a framework. Language began from feelings while others have held that it started from sound and intelligent idea. Language learning is a multifaceted process that extends beyond mere vocabulary and grammar. One crucial yet often overlooked component is body language. As communicators, we naturally convey and interpret messages through non-verbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, and posture. Understanding and utilizing body language can significantly enhance the language learning experience. (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

1.2 The Importance of the Study

Searle (2006:2) points out that all languages depend on the procedure of semiosis to relate signs to specific implications. Oral, written and body languages contain a phonological framework that administers how images are utilized to shape arrangements known as words or morphemes, and a syntactic framework that represents how words and morphemes are joined to shape expressions and articulations. Human language has the properties of profitability and dislodging, and depends altogether on social tradition and learning. Its mind boggling structure manages a substantially more extensive scope of articulations than any known arrangement of creature communication. Language is thought to have begun when early primates began bit by bit changing their primate communication frameworks, gaining the capacity to shape a hypothesis of different personalities and a mutual purposefulness. This advancement is sometimes thought to have concurred with an expansion in cerebrum volume, and numerous etymologists see the structures of language as having developed to serve particular informative and social capacities. (Hurford, 2014).

¹ How to cite the article: Joodi A.H., Alnoori B.S.M (August 2025); The Role of Body Language in Language Learning; *International Journal of Advancement of Social Science and Humanity*; Jul-Dec 2025, Vol 20, 27-39

1.3 Aims

The aim of the research is

1. To find out to what extent, the role of body language in language learning.
2. To give a full about the meaning of the role of body language in language learning and its effects on both the learners and the teachers.

1.4 Limits

The scope of the study is limited to the role of body language in language learning. The research paper was conducted for Iraqi schools for secondary school (Taha) a governmental school at Baghdad for boys in the second semester in the morning studies. The current research paper is a modern one, written in 2024_2025. The research covers a wide range in order to get good results, which can help several instructors in using the suitable body language signals.

1.5 Value

This research is significant for both learners and teachers or instructors. It helps the instructors to know the best verbal and non-verbal signals to their teaching platform because most of the students prefer it rather than other platforms. The learner will know the best suggested platform that they need to use if they want to enroll in any course.

1.6 Plan

This research will consist of four sections and rounds of concluding remarks as well as references, In other words, the research will include the following points:

1. Making introduction for the current study.
2. Making a theoretical background that includes all the details about the research.
3. Forming a questionnaire for the study and showing its results.
4. Drawing a conclusion for the study.

1.7 Definition of Basic Terms

1.7.1 Body Language

Body language is a form of nonverbal communication. Humans send and interpret such signals sometimes unconsciously. It may provide cues as to the attitude or state of mind of a person. Body language is "the unspoken or non-verbal mode of communication that we use in every single aspect of our interaction with another person. It is like a mirror that tells us what the other person thinks and feels in response to our words or actions" (Edwards, 2008, p.12).

1.7.2 Language Learning

Language learning refers to the process of acquiring the ability to communicate effectively in a new language. This encompasses understanding and producing spoken and written forms of the language, as well as mastering its vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. (Garrison, 2015).

2. Section Two / Theoretical Background and Previous Studies

2.1 Introductory Notes

This section is dedicated to provide a detailed description of body language and its relations with teaching and learning methods.

2.2 Body language

Body language is a form of nonverbal communication. Humans send and interpret such signals sometimes unconsciously. It may provide cues as to the attitude or state of mind of a person. Body language is "the unspoken or non-verbal mode of communication that we use in every single aspect of our interaction with another person. It is like a mirror that tells us what the other person thinks and feels in response to our words or actions" (Edwards, 2008:12).

Edwards(2008) in his book *The Deepest Desire of your Heart* explains that we use body language everyday in our lives to get our messages across, to achieve positive feedback in our lives and to get whatever we want. He shows that one uses this language all the time, but one may not be aware of it. Moreover, this language does not involve the face but the whole body as well. With this language one is able to interpret other people's inner emotions even if he/she is not directly expressing it. Consequently , a person is able to modify his/her behaviour to fit the situation. Body language may indicate aggression, attentiveness, boredom, relaxed state, pleasure, amusement, besides many other cues which will be focused on through the coming pages.

The science of body language is a fairly modern study dating primarily from around 60 years ago, although body language itself is as old as humans. Before verbal communication, cave-dwellers relied on their bodies to communicate. Their simple brains informed their faces, torsos and limbs. They instinctively knew that fear, surprise, love, hunger, and annoyance were different attitudes requiring different gestures. Speech is mainly used to convey information, body language has been around. Before the 20th century, the first known written work exclusively addressing body languages is John Bulwer's *chirologia: the Natural*

Language of the Hand, published in 1644; by the 19th century, directors and teachers of drama were instructing their actors and students how to convey emotion and attitude through movement and gestures. Interestingly, a study made by professor Albert Mehrabian shows that 7 percent of the messages (received and responded to during face-to-face communication) conveyed through words, 38 percent is revealed through vocal quality, and 55 percent comes through gestures, expression, and posture. There are more than 600 muscles in the human body and the most important part of the body is the face. It contains about 90 muscles; 30 of which are there purely to express emotion. (Defining Body Language,2009:12)

Body language is a form of non-verbal communication including body posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye movements. Humans, in general, send and interpret such signals almost entirely subconsciously. Some specialists say that human communication consists of 93 percent of body language and paralinguistic cues, while only 7% of communication consists of words themselves. Other scientists assert that between 60 and 70 percent of all meaning is derived from nonverbal behavior. (Fast, 1978: 36). Whatever the percentage is, for each particular community, there could be some agreed upon interpretations for specific behaviors, and those could be different according to other communities.

Onsager (2014) states that "Some researchers conclude that nonverbal communication accounts for the majority of information transmitted during interpersonal interactions"

2.3 Types of Body Language

By body language is meant what someone intends behind assuming a certain posture plus the posture itself; hence they are grouped in this way:

a- Parts of the body.

b- Intent.

A- Parts of the body

Parts of the body include everything from head to toe as shown below:-

1- The head movement and placement of the head back to front, left to right, side to side, containing the shaking of hair.

2- Facial expressions: the face has many muscles (anywhere between 54 and 98 depending on who you ask) that moves several areas of the face. Each combination of movements of the following face elements communicates a state of mind :

- Eyebrows – up, down, rowing.

- Eyes -left, right, up, down, blinking, dilatation.

- Nose – wrinkle (at the top), flaring of the nostrils.

Lips – smiling, snarling, puckered, kissing, opened, close, and tight.

- Tongue – in, out, rolled, tip up or down, licking of lips.

- Jaw – open, closed, clinched, lower jaw left or right.

3- Body posture: It means the way one places his/her body, arms, and legs, in relation to each other, and in relation to other people.

- Body Proximity - how far or close to other people.

- Shoulder movements – up, down, hanging, hunched.

- Arm placement -up, down, crossed, straight.

- Leg and feet towards speaking partner or pointing elsewhere, dangling of shoes.

4- Hand and finger gestures – how one holds and moves his hands and fingers are particularly insightful in reading people.

5- Handling and placement of objects (ex. Pens, papers, etc.). Though this is not a body part, it does play a body part, but object does play a big role in reading body language.

2 – Intent

Another way to group types of body language is along intent:

1- Voluntary \ intentional movements – usually called

"Gestures", these are movements one intends to make, like shaking, giving the finger, blinking with one eye.

2- Involuntary movements – usually called "tells" but "ticks" also fall into this category- Any body movements the person has no control over fall in this category; sweating also applies, though it is not a body movement technically. So where is the tone of voice?

While usually seen as a body language, a tone of voice and intonation are a separate group from body language [though for another opinion a tone of voice and intonation are characteristics of the verbal language] for completeness sake, these are the groups that are found in a tone of voice:

- Pitch of voice – high voice, low voice, intonation.
- Loudness – everything from shouting to whispering.
- Breathing – slow, fast breathing, shaking voice.

(www.simplybodylanguage.com).

The gestures and tone go along together to highlight the state for the listener if the speaker was praising or ridiculing him. This occurs through what is known as 'eloquent silence' to send messages of acceptance, anger, or other meanings.

2.4 Faking Body language

There is a very prominent question here; can you fake body language? The general answer to this question is no because of the lack of congruence that is likely to occur between the main gestures, the body's micro – signals and the spoken words. For example, open palms are associated with honesty but when the faker holds his palms out and smiles at you as he tells a lie, his micro – gestures give him away. His pupils may contract, one eye brow may lift or the corner of his mouth may twitch, and these signals contradict the open palm gesture and the sincere smile. The result is that the receiver, especially women, don't tend to believe what they hear.

—Body language is easier to fake with men than with women because, overall, men aren't good readers of body language". (www.westside to astmasters.com).

2.5 The Role of Body Language in Education

In education, body language is a significant tool for both teachers and students. Teachers can use body language to enhance verbal communication, establish authority, and foster a positive learning environment. For instance, a teacher's open posture or enthusiastic gestures can motivate students and encourage engagement (Hall, 2016). Conversely, closed or defensive body language may create barriers in communication. Body language also helps to manage classroom dynamics and provides immediate feedback to students about their behavior or understanding (Andersen, 2009). This section will explore how body language affects the communication process in classrooms and its role in enhancing student engagement.

2.6 Types of Body Language in the Classroom

Various forms of body language are employed in the classroom, each playing a distinct role. Facial expressions are a powerful form of non-verbal communication, influencing the emotional tone of the lesson and signaling the teacher's attitudes towards students' responses (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). Gestures, such as hand movements or pointing, can emphasize key points, make abstract concepts more tangible, and clarify instructions (Argyle, 2013). Posture communicates authority or approachability and helps establish the teacher's position within the learning space. Eye contact, when used effectively, builds rapport and signals attentiveness, while its absence may indicate disinterest (Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2013). Proxemics, or the use of space, is another crucial aspect, as it affects how comfortable students feel and how the teacher commands the room. Movement and positioning are also essential for maintaining

engagement and establishing connections with the students. This section will provide a deeper understanding of these various forms of body language and their functions in the classroom.

2.7 Teacher and student's Body Language and their Effects

The teacher's body language directly influences the classroom environment and students' learning experiences. Non-verbal cues such as a smile or an encouraging gesture can foster a positive, welcoming atmosphere, while a stern look or crossed arms can convey disapproval or control (Duncan, 2014). The teacher's body language also influences students' perceptions of their competence, confidence, and authority.

A teacher who uses open, welcoming gestures may inspire trust and participation, while a teacher who adopts a closed or rigid posture may create a sense of distance or fear (Mercer, 2010). Research has shown that students are more likely to engage and perform better when they feel emotionally connected to their teacher, which is often facilitated through body language (Mast, 2007).

Understanding student body language is just as important as recognizing the teacher's non-verbal cues. Students' facial expressions, posture, and movements provide insight into their emotional state, engagement level, and understanding of the material. For example, students who are confused may furrow their brows, while those who are engaged may lean forward or make eye contact (Mehrabian, 1972). Recognizing these signals allows teachers to adjust their teaching methods in real-time, offering additional support or adjusting the pace of the lesson (Bodily, 2008). In addition, students' body language can also indicate their comfort level with the teacher or peers, affecting classroom dynamics.

Body language can vary significantly across cultures, and understanding these differences is crucial in a diverse classroom. For example, in some cultures, direct eye contact is seen as a sign of confidence and respect, while in others, it may be perceived as disrespectful or confrontational (Gillespie & O'Rourke, 2012). Similarly, gestures that are friendly in one culture might be offensive in another. Teachers must be aware of these cultural differences to avoid misinterpretation and foster an inclusive classroom environment (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Additionally, body language is also shaped by contextual factors such as the classroom setting, the age of the students, and the subject matter being taught (LeBaron & Pillay, 2017). This section will examine the cultural and contextual factors that influence how body language is interpreted in educational settings.

Effective classroom management involves not only verbal instructions but also the strategic use of body language. Teachers can use non-verbal cues to guide students' behavior, maintain focus, and reinforce classroom rules (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). For example, a teacher might use a specific gesture to signal quiet or raise a hand to indicate that a transition is about to occur. Teachers' body language also plays a role in managing disruptions or challenging behavior, as a calm and confident posture can project authority, while an aggressive stance may escalate tensions (Lester, 2010).

While body language is an essential part of communication, it is not always easy to interpret. Misunderstandings can arise when teachers or students misread each other's non-verbal cues. For example, a teacher may misinterpret a student's slouching posture as disinterest, when it may actually indicate physical discomfort (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 2009). Similarly, a student's lack of eye contact might be seen as a lack of attention, while in some cultures, it is a sign of respect. These misinterpretations can lead to communication breakdowns and affect the overall learning environment. This section will explore common challenges in interpreting body language and provide strategies for improving non-verbal communication in the classroom.

2.8 Previous Studies

1. Al-Hajmee, A. A. M. (2022). The Effect of Body Language on Oral Comprehension of Iraqi EFL Learners. *The Modern Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 249-270. This study investigates how teachers' use of body language,

including facial expressions, gestures, and body movements, influences the oral comprehension of Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

2. Kucuk, T. (2023). The Power of Body Language in Education: A Study of Teachers' Perceptions. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 10(3), 275-285. This research explores the significance of body language in education by gathering instructors' opinions on its impact on teaching effectiveness and classroom dynamics.

3. Azeez, R. A., & Azeez, P. Z. (2017). Incorporating Body Language into EFL Teaching. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, 3(2), 46-55. This study examines the role of body language as a non-verbal communicative technique in teaching English as a Foreign Language, emphasizing its importance in enhancing the teaching and learning process.

4. Al-Radhi, H. (2023). Verbal and Non-verbal Use of Language Utilized by Iraqi Media Students in Drama Lessons. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 14(1), 224-238. This research highlights the importance of utilizing both verbal and non-verbal communication prompts in teaching drama to Iraqi media students, demonstrating how body language can enhance student engagement and academic achievement.

5. The last study is conducted by Bushra Al_Noori (2024) that ensures that body language is a vital aspect of communication that significantly enhances teaching and learning. It includes non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, posture, and eye contact, which help convey emotions, intentions, and messages more effectively than words alone. In classrooms, teachers use body language to engage students, build rapport, and manage behavior. It also reinforces verbal communication, ensuring clarity, and can help create a positive learning environment. Additionally, cultural awareness of body language is essential for avoiding misunderstandings in diverse classrooms, making it an indispensable tool for educators and learners alike.

3. Section Three

3.1 Introductory Note

This section includes Experimental Design, questionnaire and 5 Items for the questionnaire design.

3.2 Experimental Design

The researcher checks previous studies before writing the questionnaire items.

According to the information the questionnaire items were designed. The questionnaire designed online by using google forms and published online for

the students in social media apps especially, body language. The questionnaire items are a collection of questions designed to investigate the students' preferences and opinions about body language. The questionnaire was designed online by using google forms and published online for the students in social media apps especially body language. The questionnaire items are a collection of questions designed to investigate the students' preferences and opinions about virtual learning and face-to-face learning. The researcher faced the problem that most of the students are not as interactive as they should be, so they did not answer the questionnaire themselves except if someone tried to motivate them to do that.

3.3 Questionnaire

The researcher has designed a questionnaire which consists of 8 items including the gender (Females). 8 items can be listed as follows:

Choose your gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

Grade:

☐ First grade

☐ Second grade

☐ Third grade

☐ Fourth grade

☐ Fifth grade

☐ Sixth grade

City

☐ Baghdad

☐ Others

Choose your preferred answer carefully:

1. Body language is important in communication.

Agreed

Disagree

Neutral

2. A smile is a universal way to show happiness.

Agreed

Disagree

Neutral

3. Crossed arms always mean someone is angry.

Agreed

Disagree

Neutral

4. People use body language differently in different countries.

Agreed

Disagree

Neutral

5. Eye contact is a good way to show you are listening.

Agreed

Disagree

Neutral

6. Nervous people often avoid eye contact.

Agreed

Disagree

Neutral

7. Body language is more important than words in communication.

Agreed

Disagree

Neutral

8. I use body language to express my feelings.

Agreed

Disagree

Neutral

3.4 The Experience of Iraqi Teacher about Body Language**The Experience of an Iraqi Teacher about Body Language**

An Iraqi teacher conducted an experimental test with 30 pupils to investigate the role of **body language** in enhancing classroom communication and learning outcomes. The pupils were divided into two groups: a **controlled group** (15 pupils) who had prior experience observing the teacher's use of body language during lessons and an **experimental group** (15 pupils) who had never been exposed to the teacher's use of body language.

The teacher designed an activity to evaluate the pupils' ability to understand instructions and complete tasks based on the teacher's use of gestures, facial expressions, and physical movements. In this activity, the pupils were divided into small groups of five. Each group was given a set of 13 cards, each featuring a picture of sports equipment. As the teacher showed the cards, they used gestures and physical actions to explain the items. For example, the teacher

mimicked dribbling for basketball, kicking for a soccer ball, and bumping for volleyball. These non-verbal cues were crucial in helping the pupils associate the images with their meanings.

After the demonstration, the cards were shuffled, and four pupils in each group were dealt three cards each. Without speaking, the pupils were required to use body language to describe the items on their cards to their group members.

Results:

The controlled group completed the activity successfully because they were familiar with interpreting the teacher's body language and could effectively use similar gestures themselves. In contrast, the experimental group failed to complete the activity. Their lack of prior exposure to body language as a communication tool made it difficult for them to understand the teacher's instructions and collaborate with their peers.

The results are summarized below:

The Total Number	Types of Groups	The Results
15 pupils	Controlled group	They achieve all the activities
15 pupils	Uncontrolled group	They don't achieve the activities

This experiment demonstrates the critical role of body language in teaching. Gestures, facial expressions, and physical movements enhance understanding and communication, making it easier for pupils to grasp instructions and participate actively in activities. Teachers can use body language as a powerful tool to bridge gaps in understanding, especially in interactive and collaborative classroom environments.

4. Section Four: Results Analysis

4.1 Introductory Notes

In this section, the researcher will analyze the results of the questionnaire.

4.2 The Statistical Results for the Questionnaire

The participants were quite active with the researcher, and the majority of the kids were very interactive and completed the questionnaire correctly. The total number of participants according to their gender was 150. The analysis of the data collected from the student will be presented as the table below:

The questions	Yes	No	Neutral
First question	66.7	3.3	23.4

Second question	73.3	6.7	26.7
Third question	33.3	3.3	23.3
Fourth question	60	13.3	26.5
Fifth question	40.5	20.1	36.2
Sixth question	46.8	5.2	12.9
Seventh question	41.5	16.7	33.1
Eighth question	35.6	20	29.1

From the results above, it's noticeable that the pupils have proved that the method is valuable and efficient in the students' way of learning. Today parents are becoming more and more conscious that students need to work in a relaxed environment. In this respect, it will be very helpful for parents who can afford materials for his students because these methods develop the students' intelligence.

Body language is an essential part of communication, especially in teaching, where it enhances understanding, engagement, and relationships. Through gestures, facial expressions, and posture, teachers can convey ideas and emotions that words alone may not fully express. One key role of body language is to aid understanding. Gestures and movements help clarify instructions and explain complex concepts, particularly for younger learners or those with limited language skills. Actions like pointing or mimicking make abstract ideas more accessible and easier to grasp.

Additionally, body language fosters engagement in the classroom. Expressive gestures, smiles, and open postures create a welcoming and interactive atmosphere, encouraging students to stay attentive and participate. These non-verbal cues can also motivate learners and keep them interested in lessons. Finally, body language strengthens the connection between teachers and students. Simple actions like maintaining eye contact, nodding, or leaning forward while listening show empathy and attentiveness, helping students feel understood and valued.

In summary, body language is a powerful tool in teaching, improving understanding, engagement, and relationships, and contributing to a dynamic and productive learning environment.

5. Conclusion

This research had arrived to some results-recommendations, and concluding remarks, can be listed as follow:

Body language is a critical element in teaching and learning systems, significantly influencing how information is delivered, received, and retained. Non-verbal communication, such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, and eye contact, plays an indispensable role in enhancing the educational process and fostering a productive classroom environment.

Firstly, body language enhances the clarity of communication between teachers and students. Through gestures and physical movements, teachers can simplify complex concepts and make abstract ideas more tangible. This is

particularly important for learners with limited language proficiency or younger students, where visual cues often complement verbal instructions.

Secondly, the use of body language creates an engaging learning environment. Teachers who use expressive gestures, maintain eye contact, and adopt open postures can captivate students' attention and encourage active participation. This engagement is crucial for motivation and helps students feel more connected to the learning process.

Lastly, body language strengthens teacher-student relationships, which are essential for effective learning. Positive non-verbal cues, such as nodding, smiling, and leaning forward, demonstrate empathy and attentiveness, making students feel understood and valued. Such interactions build trust and improve classroom dynamics, ultimately enhancing the overall learning experience.

In conclusion, body language is a powerful and indispensable tool in teaching and learning systems. By fostering clarity, engagement, and positive relationships, it enhances communication and creates an interactive and inclusive educational environment.

6. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

7. Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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