

## THE ROLE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN ENHANCING INTERACTION IN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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### Abstract

This study aims to explain nonverbal communication during online learning, nonverbal communication that can support verbal communication. Online learning is indeed not uncommon anymore, performance as a good communication is necessary so that it becomes effective communication in learning at the Informatics Engineering Study Program, University of Yudharta Pasuruan. This study applies Harold Lasswell's Theory (Who Says What In Which Channel to Whom With What Effect). Qualitative descriptive research method and type of research Case study. The subjects studied in this study were lecturers who taught. Data were collected through observation, interviews and documentation. The data that has been collected is analyzed with MDAP, source triangulation analysis, data presentation and conclusions. The research was conducted at the Informatics Engineering study program, Yudharta University, Pasuruan. This research was conducted from January to February 2022. The results of the study stated that the phenomena of nonverbal communication that occurred were facial expressions in the form of a smile, Giving gazes to participants as a form of eye gaze to participants, Hand gestures (movement of describing items, counting movements and greeting movements) which is done when explaining to help participants understand the material from the resource persons, Appearance (virtual background and clothing) to increase interest and increase the focus of participants. All of this has the effect of strengthening learning communication with the effects obtained by participants, including: increasing student enthusiasm for learning, bringing pleasure in lectures, making it easier to understand the material, and appearance as a figure to be imitated.

**Keywords:** Learning Communication, Nonverbal Communication, Online Learning, Zoom Meeting and Gesture

### A. INTRODUCTION

Nonverbal communication in a learning environment plays a significant role for teachers to apply with their students (Muslim 2020). Nonverbal communication is often used as a support for verbal communication. Nonverbal messages are conveyed to strengthen the verbal communication of the learning material, making communication more effective. Effective communication with students is crucial to support teaching success. Teachers must fully recognize the importance of nonverbal behavior in the classroom. There are several reasons why understanding nonverbal behavior is essential during the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Maisarah 2013). First, teachers can better receive messages from students if they are sensitive to students' nonverbal behavior. Second, teachers can become better signal senders, which can enhance learning. Third, the psychological closeness between teachers and students can also be enhanced through nonverbal communication models.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to find ways to avoid the disease while still being able to communicate. This virus spreads very easily, and one preventive measure is the implementation of social distancing/physical distancing. The government, through the

Ministry of Education and Culture, issued a circular on conducting learning processes in higher education institutions online (Sadikin and Hamidah 2019).

Teaching and learning processes have largely been conducted online Zoom Meeting (Yudhira 2021). Online learning refers to learning that utilizes multimedia technology, video, virtual classrooms, online text, animations, voice messages, email, phone calls, conferences, and online video streaming platforms like, Google Meet, Jitsi, and others. In online learning, communication is not direct or face-to-face between the communicator and the communicant, as there is a connecting medium in the form of an auxiliary application accessed via the internet, allowing for distance learning between educators and students.

Considering the phenomenon, teaching success in delivering material greatly depends on the smoothness of interaction between teachers and students. This shift from face-to-face or offline learning to online (virtual) learning requires teaching skills to be reviewed from the perspective of nonverbal communication used by the teacher as the communicator in the teaching process. According to Albert Mehrabian (Mulyana 2017), 93% of all social meaning in face-to-face communication is derived from nonverbal cues. Therefore, nonverbal communication is a crucial aspect of the communication process in teaching and learning. The online teaching and learning process is interesting to study in terms of the performance of teachers as communicators in delivering learning material by optimizing nonverbal communication during online teaching.

The research questions in this study are:

- a. How is nonverbal communication carried out in online learning?
- b. How is the performance of teachers' communication skills during online learning?
- c. What are students' responses to the occurrence of nonverbal communication and its impact on performance during online learning?

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication is a form of communication that does not use verbal language but instead relies on various other methods such as body movements, facial expressions, sign language, and symbols to convey messages. It plays a significant role in various contexts, including films, the COVID-19 pandemic, and traditional customs

Several key indicators of nonverbal communication include:

1. Facial expressions – Emotional signals that play a crucial role in social interactions (Finset & Piccolo, 2011).
2. Eye contact – Influences trust and interpersonal relationships (Patterson, 2018).
3. Hand and body movements – Used to emphasize or substitute verbal communication (Burgoon & Guerrero, 2012).
4. Body posture – Reflects attitudes and dominance in social communication (Remland, 2017).
5. Proxemics (personal space) – Varies across cultures and affects the meaning of communication (Mandal, 2014).
6. Touch – Functions as a tool to express empathy and social power (Jing-lin, 2007).
7. Paralanguage – Tone, pitch, and speech rhythm significantly impact communication (Smith & Smith, 1981).
8. Eye and eyebrow expressions – Indicate interest, surprise, or disbelief (Hall, 2001).
9. Physical appearance and clothing – Influence social perception and interaction (Aikins, 2011).

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10. Use of space and environment – The physical context in nonverbal communication affects message effectiveness (Kiernan, 2013).

### **Online Learning**

Online learning is an educational method that utilizes technology and the internet as the primary medium for interaction and material delivery. In practice, the effectiveness of online learning is influenced by several indicators (Baburajan, Noushad, Faisal & Awawdeh, 2022):

1. Student participation and engagement – Active engagement in online classes enhances learning effectiveness (Orikana, Yulia & Krismiyati, 2022).
2. Interaction between teachers and students – Limited direct interaction is a major challenge in online learning (Basar, Mansor, Jamaludin & Alias, 2021).
3. Use of technology – Proper utilization of Learning Management Systems (LMS) supports the learning process (Coles, 2023).
4. Interaction among students – Collaborative learning in an online environment aids comprehension (Juneja, 2021).
5. Achievement of learning targets – Evaluating learning outcomes in online settings remains a challenge in ensuring student understanding (Adnan & Nawi, 2023).
6. Student motivation and independence – Motivation in online learning tends to decrease compared to face-to-face learning (Gozaly, Talar, Wirawan & Kurniawan, 2023).
7. Accessibility – Internet access and device limitations pose challenges for students in remote areas (Ratnasari, Saputra & Rahmana, 2021).
8. Quality and content of learning – The quality of online learning materials plays a crucial role in determining learning success (Satyarini, Kasidi & Setyaningsih, 2022).

### **C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research to be conducted is a qualitative type of research. Qualitative research is a research procedure that can produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken narratives from the observed subjects. The goal of qualitative research is to obtain a comprehensive picture of the observed phenomenon (Parent et al. 2023). The descriptive approach aims to describe in detail a message or text. This method is solely to describe aspects and characteristics of a message.

The data collection techniques in this research include: First, observation, which is conducted during Zoom Meetings when the learning process takes place. The researcher observes directly, and the findings will be documented as observation data. Nonverbal communication models can be directly observed during online learning through Zoom Meetings. Second, interviews, which are a process of interpersonal communication aimed at gathering information. A question-and-answer conversation takes place between the researcher and the respondents. The results of the conversation will be analyzed later as data. The interview respondents for this study are lecturers and students from the Informatics Engineering program at Yudharta University, Pasuruan, who participate in online learning through the Zoom Meeting application. Students are selected randomly using the random sampling technique. The questions are prepared in advance in an interview guide. The explanations from the respondents provide supporting information about the observed phenomena during online learning. Third, documentation is used as supporting data for the observations and interviews regarding the form of nonverbal messages and obstacles

encountered by the researcher. According to Sugiyono (2019), "Documents are records of past events. Documents can be in the form of writings, images, or monumental works of a person." Documentation in this study is conducted during Zoom Meetings for the three research samples. Documentation may include Zoom Meeting recordings and findings of nonverbal communication obtained from the teacher as the communicator.

The data analysis technique uses the MDAP (Manual Data Analysis Procedure) method. According to Bungin Burhan (2019), MDAP has several stages: transcription, coding, categorization, and memos. The data obtained from the phenomenon of online learning through Zoom Meetings from credible and reliable informants will be analyzed. The informants selected meet the eligibility criteria for the results obtained. The accuracy of the data is tested by matching it with reality through data triangulation analysis. The summarized data is then interpreted based on in-depth analysis. The data is subsequently explained in the form of descriptions or narratives and supported by images.

## **D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **General overview**

The Informatics Engineering program at Yudharta University Pasuruan is one of the study programs in the Faculty of Engineering. This program was established on August 1, 2002, with the Establishment Decree No. 146/D/O/2002. Currently, the Informatics Engineering program is accredited (B). The location is at Jl. Universitas Yudharta Pasuruan No. 7A Sengonangung Purwosari, Pasuruan, East Java. The program has 9 lecturers, supported by 2 administrative staff and 1 laboratory officer. The head of the Informatics Engineering program is Muhammad Imron Rosadi, S.Kom, M.Kom

Vision: "To become a study program that produces outstanding graduates in the field of informatics engineering, with competencies in intelligent computing, mobile and game programming, and network-based computing in the religious pluralistic Industrial Revolution 4.0 era by 2022."

Mission: To provide education and training, both theoretical and practical, in the field of informatics engineering with competencies in intelligent systems, mobile and game application programming, and network-based computing in a religious and pluralistic environment, to conduct research in the field of informatics engineering with a religious and pluralistic approach, to carry out community service in the field of informatics engineering with a religious and pluralistic approach, to establish collaborations with regional, national, and international stakeholders in the field of informatics engineering with a religious and pluralistic approach.

In the academic year 2021/2022, during the odd semester, the teaching and learning process in the Informatics Engineering program was conducted online due to the ongoing pandemic. Social distancing and avoiding crowds were necessary during the pandemic. Online learning became a solution to maintain the teaching process. The platform used was Zoom Meeting Premium. Pre-class information was often shared through WhatsApp groups for each class or semester. Discussions about class-related information, including Zoom Meeting links, were frequently held via this platform. Online learning had direct and indirect impacts, affecting both individuals involved and the institutions implementing it, but it remained a solution for the continuity of classes.

The analysis of nonverbal communication conducted by lecturers in the Informatics Engineering program at Yudharta University Pasuruan involved observing the body language of the lecturers during online learning as follows:

### **Smile**

At the start of the Zoom Meeting, the lecturer practiced the "3 S" (Salam, Sapa, and Senyum – Greetings, Greetings, and Smiles). The greeting used was the Islamic greeting "Assalamualaikum Wr. Wb." since the majority of Informatics Engineering students are Muslim. Smiling occurred before starting the lesson, along with greeting students who joined the online class through the Zoom Meeting application. Smiling is part of facial expressions.



**Figure 1.** Smile ekspression

The smile is clearly visible, even though it doesn't reveal teeth, but the lecturer's lips widen to the right and left. The lecturer's face is also directed towards the monitor, seen by the participants or Informatics Engineering students. The smile conveys a sense of cheerfulness.

"I smile to ensure the learning process doesn't feel rigid and to greet the students, making them feel more comfortable with us." The smile is also used as a form of praise for the students.

Familiarity is built from the beginning to establish a connection with the students who are listening to the material being delivered by the lecturer.

### **Giving Eye Contact to Participants**

In virtual meetings, there are indeed limitations in making eye contact with every participant present. Based on observation data, it was noted that the speaker, or communicator, frequently glanced to the right and left. The effort to make eye contact with the students is a form of attention or a way to ensure the participants are paying attention to the communicator's speech..



**Figure2.** Eye Contact Expression

Glancing to the right and left, in addition to explaining the presentation slides, is also used to monitor students during busy times, etc. This also helps to convey that our explanations are not monotonous. Monitoring students to maintain a conducive learning environment is also necessary during online learning. To avoid one-way explanations, the lecturer looks to the right and left.

### **Hand Movements**

One part of nonverbal communication is body language. In online learning, body language is quite limited, with hand movements being one of the few visible forms. Hand

movements are often present while speaking or explaining, as observed in the findings. Movement to Reinforce Messages



Figure 3. Hand movements

Hand movements support verbal communication by reinforcing the message being conveyed, helping the receiver feel more confident about the message. Observations show that the movements made involve extending both hands forward. These hand movements act as a complement to the spoken words.

Moving the hands helps the lecturer explain the material being presented. In my opinion, body movement anatomy is important, not just verbal or nonverbal communication.

#### Movements to Describe Objects

Some research findings show hand movements that describe objects or items being discussed during explanations. Hand movements attempt to mimic the objects being described. Using hand movements to explain is one form of nonverbal communication used to strengthen verbal communication. Interview results indicate that hand movements have a purpose.

Moving the hands assists the lecturer in explaining the material. In my view, body movement anatomy is crucial, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal aspects..

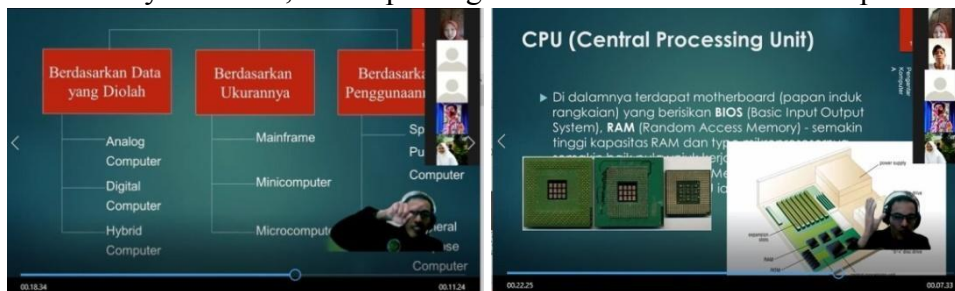


Figure 4. Expressions that describe objects

The depiction with this movement while explaining the CPU, which functions similarly to the brain, involves gestures that point towards the human brain.

The explanation of the computer is somewhat analogous to the functions of human body organs (the brain) which each have their specific roles.

#### Counting Movements

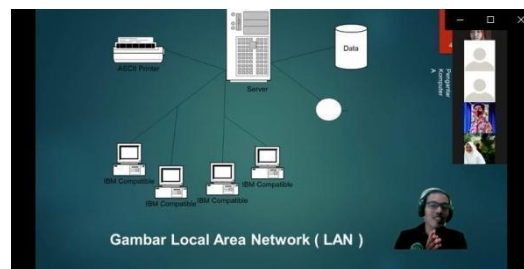


**Figure 5.** Counting expressions

The hand movements found in this study involve counting or sequential gestures. These movements help to maintain the focus of listeners or participants in online learning, as indicated by the interview results.

"To maintain the focus of students on the material being presented" (Interview Results, 2024).

### 1. Greeting Movements



**Figure 6.** Greeting Expressions

At the end of the online class session, hand gestures are observed from the lecturer. The lecturer makes a gesture of opening and joining the right and left hands. This movement occurs at the end while expressing apologies and greetings. As nonverbal language, these gestures serve as a form of greeting and apology.

### Use of Background

The appearance of the background during Zoom meetings is a feature provided by the application. This tool is utilized by Informatics Engineering lecturers during teaching. The background used features the university's identity with dominant red and white colors and the university's logo. Confirmation with the respective lecturer indicated that the use of the background aims to enhance the focus of listeners. The background is important to ensure that the learning remains focused on the material without being distracted by the surroundings behind us.

### Attire

Attire is closely associated with positioning. During online teaching, the observation of Virtual Backgrounds is similar to face-to-face interactions, as explained in the interview results as follows:

*"Attire is very important because online learning is essentially the same as offline learning, with only the medium making us different. It is important to maintain the lecturer's identity through neat clothing" (Interview Results, 2024).*



**Figure 7.** Appearance Expressions

Based on the research, data was obtained from interviews with informants, specifically Informatics Engineering students at Yudharta University Pasuruan. The nonverbal communication established by the lecturers has an impact on the students as the recipients of the information.

### **Increasing Student Motivation**

Based on findings from interviews after the lectures, which displayed nonverbal communication performance, students felt more motivated during the learning process. This enthusiasm arose because the lecturer appeared passionate while explaining the material. The limited appearance on the screen, whether on a computer or phone, did not detract from the enthusiasm for following the lessons.

"Students become more enthusiastic about learning because the lecturer creates a pleasant atmosphere. Learning is more enjoyable with a cheerful lecturer who smiles; otherwise, without a smile, we may feel less motivated to participate in online learning. I feel the interaction becomes better and less monotonous, making the learning process engaging and less boring. Most importantly, I can grasp the material better and more easily. It is more comfortable and enjoyable compared to just text, and a monotonous lecturer may make students feel more pressured and reluctant to ask questions or express their opinions" (Interview Results, 2024).

One of the factors that can increase learning motivation is the lecturer's nonverbal communication, such as smiling. A lack of boredom in receiving material is also triggered by nonverbal communication. Boredom while receiving educational content is mitigated by the lecturer's use of gestures in presenting the material.

### **Creating Enjoyment in Lectures**

Happiness arises when there is a smile from the lecturer. A smiling lecturer brings joy to the interaction or communication. The listeners also feel this joy, as indicated by the interview results with students:

"In my opinion, I feel more enthusiastic and happy with such a lecturer. It is quite enjoyable and leaves a good impression of the lecturer" (Interview Results, 2024).

A smile can create a positive impression, and an initial smile sets a pleasant atmosphere for the students.

### **Facilitating Understanding of Material**

During online learning, physical movements are limited to visible hand gestures. Hand movements also have a positive effect on helping students understand the material (Muslimin 2013). The limitations do not diminish the essence of students' understanding but help them comprehend the learning material, as evidenced by student interviews:

"We can understand better even through online methods, and it helps us to grasp the material. It is even easier to understand when the lecturer shows their face and gestures while explaining. Alhamdulillah, the course material can be understood in detail. Students will

easily absorb the course material when the lecturer uses an active and detailed teaching style" (Interview Results, 2024).

### **Using Appearance as a Model**

The lecturer's appearance during online sessions also affects the students. According to interview results, students need a role model for appearance, and the lecturer serves as one such example. This appearance model is also used when students present in virtual sessions.

"Yes, it can serve as an example for us students, showing that we should wear appropriate clothing. When it's class time, I agree with such an appearance. It can serve as a model for me. Alhamdulillah, such lecturers guide us to be more knowledgeable and understand how to discuss or present" (Interview Results, 2024).

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The use of nonverbal communication in virtual media during the teaching and learning process through Zoom Meetings in the Informatics Engineering program at Yudharta University Pasuruan. The observed nonverbal communication phenomena include: facial expressions such as smiling at the beginning of the online meeting; eye contact, which involves making eye contact with participants as an effort to engage them; hand gestures, including movements that describe objects, counting gestures, and greeting gestures. These movements are used during explanations to help participants understand the material from the source. Appearance elements include virtual backgrounds and attire, which enhance interest and focus among participants.

The impact of utilizing nonverbal communication by lecturers can guide students and help improve their understanding of the material presented. Understanding the material is a measure of the success of the teaching and learning process in lectures. These are the phenomena observed during online learning in the Informatics Engineering program at Yudharta University Pasuruan. Nonverbal communication needs further improvement and optimization to ensure that students can learn effectively and do not experience boredom during online classes.

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