

Self-Report and Student-Report Nonverbal Teacher Immediacy (NTI) in College EFL Speaking Classes

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: nonverbal teacher immediacy, self-report nonverbal immediacy, observer-report nonverbal immediacy, instructional communication

Teacher immediacy, or affinity-seeking tactics (both verbal and non-verbal) that teachers use to create a supportive and friendly learning environment for learners, is particularly relevant to EFL speaking classes with a focus on communication. This research looks into whether there is a discrepancy between how teachers and their students perceive nonverbal teacher immediacy behaviors in a Vietnamese higher-education context. Four teachers and 138 first-year EFL students from eight English-speaking skills classes at a Vietnamese college were recruited. Data analysis of students' and teachers' questionnaires and narrative analysis of teachers' interviews highlight that although the two perspectives share some similarity regarding posture, eye contact, and smiling, more prominent disparities are present in other nonverbal behaviors. The research contributes to existing literature, as well as informs teachers, teacher educators, and other stakeholders about the importance of nonverbal teacher immediacy in EFL and broader contexts.

Introduction

The idea of “immediacy” was put forward by Albert Mehrabian (1968) and defined as communication behaviors that enhance closeness, both physical and psychological, among people. Those behaviors vary from verbal to nonverbal (Frymier, 1993) and are thought to increase effectiveness in communication due to the approach-avoidance mentality (Mehrabian, 1981). Later on, the term “teacher immediacy” emerges when teachers of various contexts are observed to have applied those tactics in the classroom to create a supportive learning environment. Positioned as a “positive influence” on students (Frymier, 1993, p.454), teacher immediacy is particularly relevant to EFL speaking classes with a focus on communicative capabilities. Teacher immediacy is also categorized into two groups: verbal and nonverbal. While verbal immediacy (e.g., humor, inclusive personal pronoun, first-name basis) is often sensibly incorporated into teachers' speeches, nonverbal behaviors (e.g., eye contact, facial expression, body language) are much more subtle. This raises the question whether there is a

disparity; and if there is, then to what extent; between how a teacher and their students perceive nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

While extensively studied in foreign literature, nonverbal teacher immediacy has not been discussed much in Vietnam. Therefore, the paper hopes to explore this gap so that EFL teachers, particularly those teaching speaking, know more about students' perspectives regarding immediacy tactics when comparing them to their own. From there, teachers can make necessary adjustments to their interaction and help to enhance the effectiveness of classroom communication, leading to a more effective learning environment. The findings of this study can also be used by other stakeholders, such as decision-makers and curriculum developers, to understand their students' psychological issues better and to provide teacher training focusing on nonverbal immediacy.

Literature Review

Teacher immediacy refers to communication tactics applied by teachers in classrooms to create a sense of closeness with their learners (Mehrabian, 1968). Teacher immediacy is divided into verbal immediacy and nonverbal immediacy. Nonverbal teacher immediacy (NTI) is expressed through nonverbal behaviors that induce physical and emotional closeness, leading to higher students' affect towards the teacher and the lesson (Richmond & McCroskey, 2004). In a classroom setting, nonverbal strategies are applied in various ways, from teachers moving closer, leaning forward while talking with students, to changing the pitch and tempo of their voices. Ozmen (2011) has compiled various nonverbal tactics commonly seen employed by teachers in the classroom into Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Nonverbal teacher immediacy behaviors from Ozmen (2011)

Behaviors	A teacher displaying nonverbal immediacy in classrooms:
Physical proximity	Moves closer when talking to another Stands closer to a person when talking to them Sits closer to a person when talking to them
Body orientation	Leans forward when talking with another
Touch	Touch on the hand, forearm, or shoulder when talking to another Patting the shoulder of another when talking to them
Eye contact	Eye contact with the group as a whole when talking to them Eye contact with individuals when talking to them Looking in the general direction of another when talking to them
Facial expression	The face is animated when talking to another person Smiles when talking to another
Body movement & Gestures	Nods head when talking with another Use hands and arms to gesture when talking to another person Calmly moves the body around when talking with another
Body posture	Body posture is relaxed when talking with another person
Vocal expressiveness	Changes in pitch and tempo of voice when talking to another person Short pauses when talking to another person Relaxed tones when talking to another

NTI has various positive impacts on students in general. Many researchers have highlighted an increased student motivation from nonverbal immediacy (Comadena et al., 2007; Hsu, 2010; Frymier et al., 2019). Richmond et al. (2012) observe that students exhibit less opposition to behavioral adjustments suggested by teachers who demonstrate high immediacy. This heightened immediacy improves communication and interaction between the two, subsequently facilitating the students' ability to acquire necessary information. Furthermore, NTI has positive impacts on cognitive learning (Witt & Wheelless, 2001; Comadena et al., 2007) and academic engagement (Wang & Hu, 2023; Yuan, 2024). Richmond et al. (2012) also ascertain that the status difference between students and teachers is lessened, although they do not become equal. Consequently, students could ask questions about the subject without fear, which reinforces the pedagogical environment and leaves a positive impact on the learning process. Furthermore, Bıçkıcı (2008) posits that immediacy fosters a positive attitude that students have towards teachers and school. Similar results have been shown in some Vietnamese studies, where teacher immediacy is found to positively correlate with student motivation, affective learning, and learning outcomes (Tran & Luu, 2018), attitudes toward learning English (Le & Le, 2022) or student engagement (Dinh & Ha, 2024), reemphasizing the significance of immediacy as a whole, and nonverbal immediacy in particular, in educational contexts.

For speaking classes, a very beneficial effect would be the way immediacy greatly enhances learners' willingness to communicate. Studies have shown that learners with high willingness to talk tend to have better speaking skills, including fluency, coherence, and vocabulary usage, which is evident in both traditional and innovative learning environments (Fernández-García & Fonseca-Mora, 2019; Lee, 2020; Rahimi & Fathi, 2022; Wang & Hu, 2023; Jin, 2023). Meanwhile, researchers have pointed out the strong positive correlation between immediacy and willingness to communicate (Hsu et al., 2007; Gol et al., 2014; Sheybani, 2019) or its positive predictive role of willingness to communicate in Chinese language students (Cai, 2021). Unfortunately, similar studies pertaining to the Vietnamese context have not been found.

In terms of assessing immediacy level, various instruments were designed, like RNIM (McCroskey et al., 1995), QTI (Chiew-Goh & Fraser, 1996), NIS (Richmond et al., 2003), NICCI (Smythe & Hess, 2005), or CTIS (Zhang & Oetzel, 2006). Some encompass both verbal and nonverbal behaviors, some focus on just one aspect. When measuring teacher immediacy, Gorham and Zakahi (1990) find that teachers are highly aware of immediacy behavior usage in the class. This means self-reports of teachers on their own nonverbal behaviors can be rather reliable. Gorham and Zakahi (1990) also specify that individual student reports reliably mirrored actual teacher actions and learning results. Most recently, Lopez-Ozieblo (2025) reemphasizes such a conclusion while finding positive significant correlations between students' views of teacher immediacy in class with a third-person observation. Consequently, instruments designed to measure nonverbal immediacy using student-reported perceptions of teacher immediacy can be considered dependable tools for assessing effective teaching behaviors.

However, upon comparing different perceptions of NTI, no consensus has been reached. Folwell (2000) videotaped and surveyed 17 professors and 392 students and found no significant correlation between the two views. In contrast, Estepp et al. (2014) found both congruence and disparity across various perceived immediacy behaviors.

To sum up, research on NTI and its impacts has been extensive. However, there are two significant gaps in existing literature. First, it is evident that research in Vietnam is particularly sparse, despite the topic having received worldwide attention for many years. Another gap is the comparison between self-report and student-report teacher nonverbal immediacy. A limited

few studies are found comparing two perceptions (Gorham & Zakahi, 1990; Folwell, 2000; Estep et al., 2014), but without resolute agreement. This suggests a need for more immediacy research in the Vietnamese context, as well as research to inform teachers how their view of in-class immediacy may or may not align with that of their students.

Research Questions

Within the context of EFL classes for English-major first-year students in a Vietnamese public college, the paper aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the perception of first-year EFL students regarding their teacher's nonverbal immediacy in speaking classes?

RQ2: What is the perception of EFL teachers regarding their own nonverbal immediacy behaviors in speaking classes?

RQ3: Are there any discrepancies between the two perceptions?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The research focuses on four EFL teachers and 138 English-major first-year students studying English-speaking skills classes in a Northern Vietnamese university. Students and teachers have had 10 weeks (90 minutes/week) learning face-to-face on campus, so they interact in close quarters. These classes are in the first semester at the college, so students don't have any prior impression of their teacher's immediacy level. The four teachers teaching the English Speaking Skills course are all included in the study. These teachers are of the same age range with similar educational and working backgrounds, and their speaking classes also share similar class sizes, facilities, and materials. Surveys were carried out during the final week of class to ensure students had ample time to observe teachers' behaviors.

Design of the Study

To conduct the research, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed through surveys for both teachers and students, and interviews for teachers. The revised nonverbal teacher immediacy scales (NIS) developed by Richmond et al. (2003) were used to assess how students and teachers perceive immediacy behaviors. As aforementioned, other instruments measure teacher immediacy (McCroskey et al., 1995; Chiew-Goh & Fraser, 1996; Smythe & Hess, 2005; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006). Regardless, NIS specifically looks into nonverbal communication and has been applied and tested widely around the world, which proves to be highly credible and suitable for this research. Despite also covering nonverbal strategies, NICCI was later reviewed with a nonsignificant association between student reports and observer-coded observations (Smythe & Hess, 2005), ruling out its potential application.

Zhang and Oetzel (2006) have raised concerns over the scales' Western-centric nature, claiming some items might clash with Asian (specifically, Chinese) culture, particularly due to Asian inhibition toward physical contact among teachers and students. However, considering the research context where classes are mainly task-oriented, communication-focused, with moderate power distance - quite similar to a Western setting, the discrepancy would be insignificant.

The chosen instrument includes a self-report (NIS-S) and an observer-report (NIS-O) scale, each with 26 items. 13 positive and 13 negative items were created for each scale. Both scales

look at eight nonverbal behaviors that fit Ozmen's adapted table (2011), showing a full range of nonverbal immediate tactics. Alpha reliability of NIS-O was retested in a pilot study of 20 respondents with a high reliability of .873. Lastly, to have a deep understanding of teachers' answers in their self-report, an unstructured interview was conducted with each teacher.

Data collection & analysis

Student surveys (NIS-O), which were translated and back-translated into Vietnamese to limit the impact of the language barrier, were delivered directly in class to a total of 180 first-year English-major students in the faculty, of whom 148 responses came back, as they were given the choice of opting out if they wished, and some students were absent. From there, data were filtered for further validity and reliability, so responses stating mismatched teacher names or choosing the same option for all items were ruled out. Finally, 138 responses (76.67%) were eligible and coded for analysis in SPSS.

Similarly, teacher surveys (NIS-S) were conducted via Google Form, and four responses were coded into SPSS. Then, unstructured online interviews with all four teachers via Zalo Call were recorded for further analysis.

In the Findings and Discussion section, results would be presented through the four teachers, each coded by their role, order, and gender (See Table 2).

Table 2.

Respondent coding for teachers

Respondent	Coded as	Gender	Number of students
Teacher 1	T1M	Male	37
Teacher 2	T2M	Male	32
Teacher 3	T3F	Female	36
Teacher 4	T4F	Female	33

To interpret qualitative data from the interviews, narrative analysis was employed. To interpret quantitative data from the two scales, t-test, inter-rater reliability measurement, and discrepancy scoring were carried out.

One-sample t-test was computed on SPSS 20 for NIS-O results. Means were individually calculated and interpreted for NIS-S results. Cohen's Kappa inter-rater reliability measurement was carried out to determine possible agreement between two NIS scales. If disparities exist, Borich (1980)'s methodology is followed for discrepancy scoring.

Findings

RQ1: What is the perception of first-year EFL students regarding their teacher's nonverbal immediacy in speaking classes?

The NIS-O scale was used to gain insights into students' observation of their Speaking class teacher's nonverbal immediacy. For this scale, Richmond et al. provide a norm of combined mean at 94.2, which is the test value for a one-sample t-test. The discount of observers' gender is due to the insignificant disparity across male and female observers (Richmond et al., 2003). From that, the results can be seen below (See Table 3).

Tables 3.*One-Sample Statistics*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Mean	Error
T1M	37	100.81	13.059	2.147	
T2M	32	93.03	14.414	2.548	
T3F	36	116.39	8.983	1.497	
T4F	33	103.67	10.114	1.761	

One-Sample Test

Test Value = 94.2						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
T1M	3.079	36	.004	6.611	2.26	10.97
T2M	-.459	31	.650	-1.169	-6.37	4.03
T3F	14.820	35	.000	22.189	19.15	25.23
T4F	5.377	32	.000	9.467	5.88	13.05

Four teachers are considered to be showcasing nonverbal immediacy by their students. Notably, two female teachers have relatively higher means than their male counterparts, with one teacher (T3F) even falling in the high immediacy range (>109). Besides, the higher the mean, the lower the SD, showing a trend of a more unified view in classes with more immediate teachers. Further, no teacher is regarded as of low immediacy level (<79). This is a positive sign of students feeling comfortable with their instructor in the class.

Upon looking closely at students' reception of each individual nonverbal behavior, more than half the positive items (items 6, 12, 14, 17, 19, 22, 25) score highly in perceived frequency (>4.0) (See Table 4).

This means that, as students see it, teachers "often" employ nonverbal tactics such as: posture (item 6), vocal expressiveness (item 12, 19), gesture (item 14), eye contact (item 17, 22), and facial expression (item 25). Within these active tactics, gesturing and being animated while talking is what students can recognize most vividly. In contrast, two behaviors that students view as "almost never" and "rarely" done by teachers (items 2 and 21) are touch and body orientation. From students' perspective, teachers seem to avoid touching their learners' shoulders or arms as well as leaning toward them when in conversation. The last type of nonverbal immediacy shown through physical proximity (items 10 and 16) is of slightly lesser frequency than "occasionally". It means teachers sometimes will reduce the distance with certain students to whom they are talking.

In short, the English-majored first-year students think that their speaking teacher is moderately to highly immediate. They recognize several displays of nonverbal immediacy in their teacher, ranging from eye contact, vocal change, to body language. However, they also identify certain immediacy tactics that are less commonly utilized by teachers, most pertaining to a high level of physical closeness.

Table 4.*Mean, Sample size, Standard Deviation of Positive items*

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. He/she uses her/his hands and arms to gesture while talking to students.	4	3.4750	.55393
2. He/she touches students on the shoulder or arm while talking to them.	4	1.7550	.35940
6. He/she has a relaxed body position when he/she talks to students.	4	4.2025	.25902
10. He/she sits close or stands close to students while talking with them.	4	3.3450	.67747
12. He/she uses a variety of vocal expressions when he/she talks to students.	4	4.1050	.45317
13. He/she gestures when he/she talks to students.	4	3.7375	.60566
14. He/she is animated when he/she talks to students.	4	4.3025	.46729
16. He/she moves closer to students when he/she talks to them.	4	3.5475	.79676
17. He/she looks directly at students while talking to them.	4	4.1250	.38127
19. He/she has a lot of vocal variety when he/she talks to students.	4	4.2275	.46686
21. He/she leans toward students when he/she talks to them.	4	2.9200	.83964
22. He/she maintains eye contact with students when he/she talks to them.	4	4.1900	.38026
25. He/she smiles when he/she talks to students.	4	4.1650	.48611

RQ2: What is the perception of EFL teachers regarding their own nonverbal immediacy behaviors in speaking classes?

The NIS-S scale was employed for four EFL teachers to measure their own nonverbal immediacy in speaking classes. Their scores and norms are displayed below, divided by gender (See Table 5). For this self-report instrument, Richmond et al. (2003) recommend that gender differences be taken into account. The norm is different for each gender, with females tending to self-measure at higher immediacy (though underlying reasons are yet to be determined).

Table 5.*NIS-S Results*

Respondent	NIS-S Results	Norms
T1M	94	Males Mean = 93.8; S.D. = 10.8
T2M	82	High = >104 Low <83
T3F	112	Females Mean = 102.0; S.D. = 10.9
T4F	96	High = >112 Low = <92

Comparing two datasets, it can be seen that three out of four teachers view themselves as being moderately to highly immediate nonverbally, with the exception of a male teacher (T2M). In fact, this teacher regards himself as being of low nonverbal immediacy (<83).

Looking at specific positive immediate behaviors, female teachers use almost all tactics at some of the highest frequencies of "often" to "almost always". Using arms and hands for gesturing while talking is favored by both teachers, as they very often do this.

According to a teacher (T3F), her frequent use of nonverbal behaviors stems from both personality and personal belief that students would feel more willing to talk and express themselves in class upon seeing signs of friendliness from her.

"First-year students struggle (to a varying degree) with adapting to the communication-focused speaking classroom. Speaking fully in English would be new for many, coming from a grammar-heavy high school learning environment... I hope my friendliness will lessen their inhibition with speaking in English." (T3F)

When asked which nonverbal behaviors are most effective for such a purpose, this teacher chooses smiling, nodding, and leaning a little closer. Gestures (despite being her most frequent behaviors) could sometimes be distracting or "overpowering" for observers, so she is working on a more conscious use of gestures in class.

Meanwhile, two female teachers are most hesitant to touch students' shoulders/arms (Q2), with reasons including respecting Vietnamese culture and acting as a classroom management tactic.

"(reason to avoid touch is because) there is a Vietnamese superstition of bad luck coming from being touched on one shoulder." (T4F)

"I will when I have to signal to a distracted student... By lightly tapping on their shoulder, I can refocus this student discreetly without drawing the class's attention and risking humiliating them..." (T3F)

On the other hand, the first male teacher (T1M) uses most tactics "occasionally", except for gesture and posture ("often"). Additionally, eye contact with each student should be maintained, but only for a short while.

"I think body movements make teachers seem more available for interaction... I don't keep eye contact with any student for too long because my eyes seem serious, like I'm glaring..." (T1M)

This teacher also mentions in-class demonstration of vocal variety as a subtle way to teach intonation, unaware of its immediate impact. T1M "never" leans forward while talking because keeping an arm's length allows other students to observe/hear him too. He also "never" touches their shoulder/arm while talking to avoid causing misunderstanding of harassment.

The other male teacher (T2M) agrees in terms of touch. This teacher states that maintaining appropriate communication with students is really important; thus, behaviors suggesting close physical contact, like touch, would be socially unacceptable. Understanding the taboo of physical touch in Vietnamese social settings, he completely avoids this tactic. This rings true for both his female and male students as he tries to treat all students equally, regardless of gender.

"Male or female students, I use the same types of behaviors to treat them equally." (T2M)

Notably, T2M is fully aware of his low nonverbal immediacy and says it is his active choice to limit nonverbal behaviors in class.

"I want to focus on language while minimizing other possible distractors like body language, since a teacher's role in a first-year speaking class is to model (verbal)

language use... If I need to make students feel less stressed, I would rather say something funny..." (T2M)

Furthermore, he feels that male and female teachers would have different styles of self-expression in front of students, acknowledging the disparities across genders when it comes to teacher immediacy display. This sentiment is resonated by T1M, revealing a rather sensitive positioning of male teachers with classroom immediacy.

To sum up, four teachers vary in their self-assessment of nonverbal immediacy from low (25%), to moderate (50%), to high level (25%). Female teachers take a slight lead over men. One male teacher actively lowers nonverbal immediacy, particularly the use of body language, to draw more attention to verbal communication. For some teachers, vocal expressiveness is not purposefully used to gain affinity but to incorporate teaching.

Smiling is generally favored by all teachers. Female teachers prefer vocal expressiveness and occasionally used by male teachers. Meanwhile, body language, arms, and hand gestures, to be specific, though helpful, are believed by some to be better utilized in moderation. Too much gesturing could interfere with students' language learning process. Besides, all teachers refrain from touch and physical closeness, but to varying degrees. Male teachers employ tactics like touching the shoulder/arm or leaning forward much less often (almost never) than female ones, seemingly due to their awareness of cultural/social norms.

RQ3: Are there any discrepancies between the two perceptions?

To probe into possible agreement between students' and teachers' perspectives regarding teacher nonverbal immediacy in class, Cohen's Kappa inter-rater reliability measurement is run on each teacher paired with their corresponding class (suffixed "c"). Symmetric measures of four pairs are shown below (See Table 6).

Table 6.

Symmetric measurement

Pair	Kappa Value	Asymp. Std. Error	Approx. T	Approx. Sig.
T1M - T1Mc	0.195	0.098	2.258	0.024
T2M - T2Mc	0.086	0.111	0.915	0.360*
T3F - T3Fc	0.297	0.113	2.937	0.003
T4F - T4Fc	0.362	0.108	3.410	0.001

For two female teachers who report/are reported higher immediacy, the agreements with students' perception are fair ($0.2 < x < 0.4$), while those in male teachers are slight ($x < 0.2$). Ultimately, an agreement exists between self-perceived and student-perceived nonverbal immediacy, but the extent is not significant. For T1M, T3F, and T4F, students' perspective on how they behave nonverbally somewhat overlaps with their own. Evidently, the level of nonverbal immediacy reported by the first three teachers equates to that of their students. Meanwhile, T2M's students describe him as moderately immediate - higher than he himself reports (low immediacy). Certainly, there are disparities between the two perceptions.

For a clearer understanding of the degree of differences, mean weighted discrepancy scores of 26 items are calculated based on Borich (1980)'s method, then ranked in order of magnitude. A positive MWDS signifies that the teachers rate themselves higher on that particular item, and the magnitude of the discrepancy is reflected by MWDS values, with $MWDS < 0.66$ equating to close agreement (Estepp et al., 2014). (M_T = self-perceived mean; M_c = student-perceived mean)

Table 7.*Items with Mean Weighted Discrepancy Scores <0.66*

Items	M _T	M _c	MWDS
11. My voice is monotonous or dull when I talk to people.	1.75	1.42	0.58
24. I lean away from people when I talk to them.	1.75	1.51	0.43
8. I avoid eye contact while talking to people.	1.50	1.42	0.12
2. I touch others on the shoulder or arm while talking to them.	1.75	1.76	-0.01
23. I try not to sit or stand close to people when I talk with them.	2.25	2.29	-0.08
17. I look directly at people while talking to them.	4.00	4.12	-0.49

There are 6 items (23.07%) that teachers and students closely agree on (<0.66), confirming the low agreement measured above (Table 7).

Table 8.*Items with 0.66 < MWDS < 1*

Items	M _T	M _c	MWDS
3. I use a monotone or dull voice while talking to people.	2.00	1.63	0.73
18. I am stiff when I talk to people.	2.00	1.63	0.73
7. I frown while talking to people.	2.25	1.95	0.68
9. I have a tense body position while talking to people.	1.75	1.37	0.66
25. I smile when I talk to people.	4.00	4.16	-0.66
22. I maintain eye contact with people when I talk to them.	4.00	4.19	-0.76
6. I have a relaxed body position when I talk to people.	4.00	4.20	-0.82
13. I gesture when I talk to people.	3.50	3.74	-0.83
20. I avoid gesturing while I am talking to people.	1.75	2.24	-0.86
16. I move closer to people when I talk to them.	3.25	3.55	-0.97

In Table 8, another 38.46% (10 items) are demonstrating differences but with a small magnitude (<1). Within these 16 items, 9 of them (56%) are negative items (describing actions teachers avoid doing). The main immediacy strategies that show perception unity are posture, eye contact, and smiling.

Table 9.*Items with MWDS > 1*

Items	M _T	M _c	MWDS
26. I avoid touching people when I talk to them.	4.00	2.58	5.70
5. I move away from others when they touch me while we are talking.	2.50	1.39	2.77
1. I use my hands and arms to gesture while talking to people.	4.00	3.47	2.10
10. I sit close or stand close to people while talking with them.	3.75	3.35	1.51
15. I have a bland facial expression when I talk to people.	2.50	1.91	1.47
4. I look over or away from others while talking to them.	2.00	1.29	1.42
21. I lean toward people when I talk to them.	2.50	2.92	-1.04
12. I use a variety of vocal expressions when I talk to people.	3.75	4.10	-1.33
19. I have a lot of vocal variety when I talk to people.	3.75	4.23	-1.79
14. I am animated when I talk to people.	3.75	4.30	-2.08

Of the remaining items with clearer differences (Table 9), item 26 about avoiding touching people when talking to them scores significantly high (5.70). This means teachers think they "often" avoid touching others in conversation, yet students think the frequency is closer to "occasionally". Such clear divergence (moving from one level of frequency to another) is the biggest gap across all assessed nonverbal behaviors.

Interestingly, two items coded for touch (items 2 and 26) stood at two extremes of the 'similar to different viewpoint' scale. Item 2 describing teachers touching on their students' shoulders or arms while talking to him/her was rated by both sides at 'almost never', with the highest level of unity in the survey. Students know that their teacher refrained from touching them, and teachers show high deliberation in not doing the action. Meanwhile, item 26 is the negative of item 2, describing teachers avoiding touching someone when talking to him/her. Teachers rated this at 'often', so they mostly avoided touch. Yet the outsider viewpoint had it at 'occasionally', so teachers were perceived not to be as reserved with touch as they thought.

Other noticeable differences include: physical proximity, gesture, facial expression, and vocal expressiveness.

Discussion

The perception of first-year EFL students and EFL teachers regarding NTI in speaking classes

This study finds that English-majored first-year students in a Vietnamese university view their speaking teacher as being moderately (75%) to highly immediate (25%). They think teachers employ a variety of nonverbal tactics (facial expression, eye contact, vocal change, gesture). However, they also identify certain immediacy tactics that are less commonly utilized by teachers, most pertaining to a high level of physical closeness.

Meanwhile, four teachers' self-perception varies from low (25%), to moderate (50%), to high level (25%) of NTI, with female teachers taking a slight lead over male counterparts. Teachers self-identify the application of various nonverbal behaviors in speaking class (smiling, vocal expressiveness, gesture), many of which they use with a specific purpose in mind. Across nonverbal behaviors, touch and physical proximity are the most precarious tactics due to cultural and social norms in Vietnam.

Similarities and differences between the two perceptions

Comparison of two perceptions highlights some agreements between self-report and student-report NTI about the overall perceived immediacy level. Teachers who self-report as moderate to high immediacy have their student-report level also at moderate to high. The extent of agreement is stronger for teachers with a higher immediacy level.

As research on comparing self-report and student-report NTI is so sparse, there is yet no clear explanation for this. However, since teachers are found to be aware of their immediacy behaviors in class (Gorham & Zakahi, 1990) and students can observe and identify those behaviors from their instructors quite accurately (Lopez-Ozieblo, 2025), it's logical to conclude that the two viewpoints would overlap. Therefore, teachers can generally rest assured that the nonverbal cues they give out to lessen proximity with learners would be understood. Of which, some of the most accessible signs would be smiling at students, keeping eye contact with them (though not too long as it might become scary - as forewarned by T1M), or having a relaxed body stance. At the very least, students and teachers easily agree on what nonverbal cues non-teachers do *not* display. It seems the conception of negative items is more universally understood across respondents, so there is more room for similarity.

Nevertheless, findings on differences are more apparent and aligned with prior publications from Estep et al. (2014) and Roberts et al. (2012), noting the ever-present disparity in perspectives.

First, even when a teacher (T2M) registered himself as of low immediacy, his students perceived him as moderately immediate. Then, several nonverbal tactics regarding physical proximity, gesture, facial expression, and vocal expressiveness also witness a gap between students' and teachers' opinions. Justifying such a discrepancy, Mullane (2014) thinks that this is because teacher answers "require a generalization of the class as a whole" while students' perception is individualized. Even though the teacher thinks they don't use nonverbal affinity-seeking tactics that often in general, students might be able to recognize them more from an observer viewpoint or as the recipient of those interactional gestures. This goes to show how sensitive the students in this research context are to nonverbal communication, and teachers who worry about being too intimidating might feel less burdened.

Most interestingly, behaviors of touch demonstrate the highest polarization. Such a contradiction might stem from some psychological traits. Four teachers were fully aware of the contextual and cultural complications of touch in the Vietnamese classroom (as shown in their interviews), so they answered quite resolutely. However, students, upon seeing the word "avoid" (which generally has a negative connotation), might hesitate to give a strong reaction. Possibly, for students, touch between the instructor and the learner when described quite appropriately as "touch on the shoulder or arm" doesn't seem as impermissible; therefore, they tend to have a milder reaction to item 26. Or, the contradiction might also be a nod to Zhang and Oetzel (2006)'s criticism of the bias in existing nonverbal immediacy measures toward Western classrooms.

It is suggested that teachers adjust this behavior accordingly to their class. For example, teachers might still be able to initiate touch with students to create a sense of closeness, but should be very respectful in manner and conservative in frequency. Light touch on the shoulder for gaining students' attention, or a light tap on the upper arm as encouragement, could be culturally appropriate in the Vietnamese context. Nevertheless, different students/teachers would have different thresholds for such physical proximity, so personal observation and further research/training about learners' psychology might help to inform teachers of the appropriate behaviors.

Conclusion

The study investigates the differences between self-report and student-report nonverbal teacher immediacy at a Vietnamese university. Overall, the level of similarity is quite low, concentrating on posture, eye contact, and smiling. Differences are more present in other groups of immediate behaviors, with touch as the most divisive behavior.

However, since the scope of this study is small (on only four teachers and first-year students in a faculty) and mainly reliant on self-report, more extensive and expansive works could be done to ensure the generalizability of the results.

Later studies might work with a larger sample size, including instructors and students from different educational settings and locations; employ different methods such as observation to complement self-reported data; or conduct longitudinal research by tracking teachers' adaptation of nonverbal behaviors over time to reveal long-term impacts.

There is also potential for comparative studies on the impacts of touch as a nonverbal immediacy strategy on students across cultures, as well as further exploration on how nonverbal immediacy might impact Vietnamese students on various aspects such as motivation, academic engagement, willingness to communicate, and so on. Last but not least, adjustments could be made to existing NTI measuring scales, particularly for touch-related behaviors, so that they can work more effectively in the Asian context.

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Biodata

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