

# Cultivating Nonverbal Communication (NVC) Skills among Arabic Language Teachers in Virtual Classroom

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## Abstract

This concept paper discusses the nonverbal communication (NVC) practice among teachers during Arabic language teaching and learning in a virtual classroom in line with the technology and communication development era. The discussion showed that NVC skills practice among teachers in the virtual classrooms can be applied with knowledge of the subject content itself, exceptional basic pedagogical skills and technology support. While the culture of NVC through online or e-learning must be in line with teachers' communication and students' engagement in the traditional classroom. The implications of this study suggest that teachers who teach traditionally need to first improve their weaknesses in their NVC skills as it will be harder in online teaching process. Teachers cannot avoid following the current trend of teaching and learning changes as the need for education is constantly changing when current technologies take place.

## Keywords

Nonverbal Communication Skills (NVC), Arabic Language Teacher, Virtual Classroom

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## 1. Introduction

Communication skills have become an integral part of any education system worldwide especially during the teaching-learning and facilitating process (TLFP). TLFP cannot be performed well without effective communication (Nordin Halias, Ismail, & Baharudin, 2017). In teaching, there are two forms of communication skills, verbal and nonverbal practice. Teachers need to

well-equip themselves with these skills during the TLFP. The importance of these skills is that they are related to the dissemination of knowledge so that students can learn and master that knowledge. The combination of these two forms of communication skills is necessary as teachers' communication becomes more effective when a set of verbal and nonverbal communication skills are combined.

However, educational scholars focus more on the aspects of verbal communication (VC) skills rather than nonverbal communication skills (NVC) in their teaching to create effective teaching and achieve optimal learning outcomes. The impact of verbal communication on students contributes 20% of the learning outcomes. For example, it is difficult for students to remember every single word from teachers (Mel Silberman, 2010), and it is likely that students are not paying attention to them. While NVC gives 80% effects because students are utilizing teachers' facial expression, eye contact, body language, space or distance given by teachers, physical appearance, odor, and variation of voice (Nordin Halias et al., 2017). According to Gary (1992), teachers' ability to apply nonverbal aspects of communication can effectively maintain students' interest, enthusiasm and excitement in learning the subject matter. He also suggested that teachers need to change their voice intonation regularly, move forward and backward, communicate through eye contact with students and diversify their body movements to fit the teaching environment and create effectiveness in teaching.

Based on previous studies, the elements of NVC in teaching are still poorly discussed by most researchers as the communication is considered to be practiced only by the hearing impaired and has little to do with normal human beings (Zulkifli Abdullah, 1999). However, according to Abdullah Hassan and Ainon Mohd (2002), this assumption is inaccurate because we need to learn NVC in order to read others' behavior and control our body language. In teaching aspect, having knowledge of NVC makes our communication more effective, meanwhile as a teacher, we always want to demonstrate our skills and expertise (Abdullah Hassan & Ainon Mohd, 2002). Muhammad Azhar Zailani (2007) claimed that being knowledgeable in NVC is important in a teacher's career as it plays a vital role in facilitating teaching process, yet engaging students and directly impacting on attitude formation (Burrough, 2007), also motivation and learning outcomes (Macedonia & Knosche, 2011). The results of the study conducted by Nordin Halias (2016) also showed that NVC has a great impact on students' learning as it can enhance their motivation and interest in the classroom activity as well as improve students' achievement.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze the importance of NVC and its practice in Arabic language teaching through virtual classroom. The idea is considered to be a vital process among the teachers to overcome their weaknesses of NVC skills practice in traditional way and for their readiness to meet new challenges in electronic teaching. Also, the NVC practice is seen as an important role to be cultivated through e-learning in line with the current trend of TLFP change.

Arabic teachers should have NVC competencies to optimize the effectiveness of Arabic language teaching as the teaching style keeps changing in education circle over time. Finally, this concept paper hopes that NVC skills practice through virtual classroom will be highlighted in the next study empirically.

## 2. Definition of Nonverbal Communication (NVC) Skills

NVC is a form of communication in which messages are drawn from body language and gestures. It is also referred as body language which is the language of speech conveyed through body movement, gestures, distances, processes or tone of voice, facial expression and orientation, posture, sense of touch, odor and paralinguistic where those things give a meaning other than what is spoken (Kendon, 1981). Al-Arini (2011) defines NVC as all behaviors produced by the human body whether intentional or not, which come out naturally or learned, such as movement, punctuation, gestures, facial expression, appearance, mood and tone of voice that can be translated as a message between sender and receiver. Other researchers including Richmond & McCroskey (2000) and Floyd (2009) have also used similar terms regarding NVC elements and they combined it into ten channels as shown in Table 1.

## 3. Nonverbal Communication Practices in Virtual Classroom

The development of information and communication technology has made a huge impact on education. The use of “e” symbol as electronic has begun to appear and is being applied in TLFP as e-education and e-learning, yet it has also been implemented in a virtual room. Teachers cannot avoid following the current trend of TLFP change because of the need for education that is constantly changing. Teachers need to make changes and innovations in traditional teaching

**Table 1.** Terms of NVC in researchers circle.

No.	Terms	Scope of the Research
1	Physical appearance	Regarding individual's physical appearance like clothes
2	Kinesic	Regarding body movement such as hands and head
3	Chronemic	Regarding role of time and it's management
4	Haptic	Regarding the way to communicate or interact via the sense of touch
5	Facial Expressions	Regarding the highlighted facial expressions
6	Oculesic	Regarding the transmission or reception of meaning via eye contact
7	Proxemics	Concerning the use of personal space and conversational distance in communication
8	Paralinguistic	Regarding sound variation such as high and low voices, volume speed etc.
9	Art factual	Referring to messages conveyed by object such as environment and layout of furniture
10	Olfactic	Regarding the sense of smell or individual's odor

practices as they are less relevant to the rapid and intensive development of technology and communication. This reformation serves as a catalyst in the implementation of knowledge delivery without eliminating *face-to-face* teaching in the traditional classroom. Implementation of technology and communication within TLFP can enhance the effectiveness of learning and quality of work among educators (Chaidar Husain, 2014).

Meanwhile, teachers and students can use e-learning as a new learning system strategy. The use of e-learning can be used as a system to create more effective learning situations. Teachers can also optimize students' learning hours while engaging in other useful activities without time and place constraints. E-learning is a great alternative to the learning world. However, the practice of NVC in TLFP for virtual reality is certainly a problem for teachers as these skills are best practiced by *face-to-face* instruction in the classroom. But, if teachers have a good grasp of NVC skills in their *face-to-face* room, then they only need to do the same in a virtual room.

#### 4. Nonverbal Communication Practice in Arabic Teaching

Foreign language teaching such as teaching Arabic Language requires teachers to apply NVC. This is because the implementation of NVC can make language teaching more relevant and natural to the target language. Teachers need to be aware of teaching techniques that meet the level of acceptance and comprehension of the subject matter among students. When the teacher's teaching techniques are aligned with the student's level of understanding and ability, teaching process becomes more meaningful and accessible to the students. Mushir Ahmad (2016) emphasized that teachers' ability to foster student self-esteem can make them more interested in learning. This is also in line with the process of fostering higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) among students, where teachers need to be prepared to foster students with exploration and experimentation. The study from Kamarudin, Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusoff, Hamidah Yamat Ahmad and Kamarulzaman Abdul Ghani (2016) showed that the level of HOTS culture among Arabic Language teachers is still moderate. So, NVC is best applied when dealing with that kind of situation where teachers are not encouraged to use direct translation technique for instance in teaching Arabic vocabulary. From this point of view, teachers only provide students with enough space to explore and do an experiment by helping them using NVC such as hand and body gestures so that students can understand the words.

A good Arabic Language teacher should have many influencing characteristics including clear voice, psychological preparation and knowledge, rigorous lesson planning, creative, passionate and intelligent motivation and attractive appearance (Mohd Rosdi Ismail & Mat Taib Pa, 2007). In fact, teachers need to act as a facilitator, inspirator, motivator and director of students' learning activity and that is so-called an autonomous learning (Ziyad & Saini Ag. Damit, 2015). According to Muhammed Barakat (1984), Arabic Language teachers are the domi-

nant agent of classroom interaction. He also emphasized that in addition to mastering the knowledge, teachers have to present the language content in a way that the target group (students) could understand.

NVC skills are very synonymous with Arabic Language TLCP as those skills could make the teaching process more effective. Thus, discussion on NVC skills in Arabic Language TLCP indicates that teachers need to master NVC skills in a *face-to-face* classroom or virtual. The technology change has triggered the innovation of learning via massive open online course (MOOC) (Norazah Nordin, Helmi Norman, & Mohamed Amin Embi, 2015). The use of this technology is not only a necessity at the university level, but it should also be used at the school level to curb teachers' administration and workload problems in daily work. **Table 2** elaborates NVC practices that teachers should be aware of when conducting learning activity in a traditional classroom or virtual:

**Table 2.** Nonverbal communication practices between traditional and virtual classroom.

No.	Traditional Classroom	Virtual Classroom
1	Teacher's sensitivity towards students' attitude and response is unlimited. That always happens while in the traditional classroom.	Teacher's sensitivity towards students' attitude and response is limited. It can only be observed through student responses, answers to questions and discussions in writing if using one-way communication such as 1.0 web-based.
2	Classroom control needs to happen just as much as usual practices in traditional classroom. Teachers use existing skills to monitor students' behavior and movement in the classroom.	Classroom control is not effective as teachers do in a traditional way. However, teachers need to conduct discussion sessions and be aware of each students' interaction.
3	Teachers must face the audience directly and implement TLFP as usual.	Teachers just have to imagine the audiences are being in front of them and act like they are communicating with the students while recording the teaching video.
4	Teachers face students with a wide range of personalities, attitudes, and questions. Here, teachers need to be smart and play a role in establishing classroom environment harmoniously until TLFP is completed.	No distractions (students' attitudes, questions, etc.) from students that can cause teachers to lose focus in the classroom. At the same time, teachers can save time and spend sessions within a time frame.
5	All ten elements of NVC practice need to be implemented all the times and teachers' skills in pedagogy are essential.	Not all elements of NVC should be practiced in a virtual classroom. The NVC skills should be practiced in matching with the multimedia elements. For example, If the teacher delivers subject matter verbally by using an audio element, then the intonation needs to be improved. And if the teacher uses audio visuals, ten elements of NVC skills should be done as in the traditional way.
6	Most of the time, two-way communication between teacher and students happens. Finally, learning outcomes can be achieved at the end of the session.	There are challenges in the interaction between teachers and students in virtual communication. It should be handled wisely by teachers with effective NVC skills. If this challenge is not handled well by teachers, one-way communication takes place.

NVC skills in Arabic Language teaching need to be mastered and applied by teachers when implementing TLFP. The continued practice of NVC in Arabic Language teaching is parallel with the goals of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). This is in line with the implementation of Arabic Language as one of the additional subjects in schools with the aim of enabling students to communicate in Arabic (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1997). Besides, the objective of Arabic Language learning is to enable students to master the four language skills in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing (JAPIM, 2000). Besides, Arabic has become the language of the Quran (Mat Taib Pa, 2005, Zawawi Ismail, 2000), language of knowledge and civilization (Abd Rauf Hassan Azhari, Mohd Azidan Abdul Jabar and Hasbullah, 2005) and is an Islamic epic (Hassan Al-Banna, 1989). Also, the purpose of learning Arabic language is to learn the teachings of Islam (Zawawi Ismail, 2001) and becomes contemporary language needed in global communication matters (Ahmad Kilani Mohamed, 2001). To realize the purposes stated earlier, teachers need to inculcate NVC skills in their language teaching. **Table 3** shows the similarities and differences found in NVC practice when teachers implement Arabic Language teaching in both traditional classroom and virtual classroom. It works to give Arabic Language teachers a clear understanding of NVC skills in two different mediums.

The implications of this study indicate that NVC is very important in Arabic Language teaching in order to assist students' learning and language acquisition. Yet, for the sake of achieving an optimum effectiveness of teaching, teachers are encouraged to principally improve their NVC skills in their traditional classroom. This is because it becomes more difficult if TLFP is extended into a virtual room. Teachers cannot avoid themselves by following the current trends of teaching and learning as the needs of education change in line with the Industrial Revolution 4.0. For example, Industrial Revolution 4.0 has brought education into the digital and robotics world, when classrooms become part of it. In addition to those mentioned in **Table 3**, teachers also need to be proficient in applying multimedia or at least the education industry has the expertise to provide materials and teaching aids. The "speech balloon" in a video or lecture video can be used to add value to the NVC element using video recording. Speech balloons commonly used in comic conversations and are best used in teaching video. Speech balloons are part of the factor in developing learning content in terms of creating a sense of humor (Norazah Nordin, Helmi Norman, Mohamed Amin Embi, Ahmad Zamri Mansor, & Fazilah Idris, 2016), feelings, emotions, facial expressions during the online teaching and learning.

While Aisah Hasmam, Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusoff, Maimun Aqsha Lubis and Aisyah Sjahrony (2017) suggested that teachers should be proactive in the 21st century teaching and strive to integrate linguistic and non-linguistic contexts to understand the subject matter. This is possible through the adoption of more interactive virtual technologies. In addition, Nafiseh Zarei and Supyan Hussin (2014) argue that web 2.0 technologies such as blog management are

**Table 3.** Similarities and differences of NVC skills between traditional and virtual classroom.

NVC Skills	NVC Practice via virtual Classroom	Comparison of NVC Practice
Physical appearance	The physical appearance of teachers is similar between their presence in the traditional classroom and virtual.	
Kinesics	Adherence to body movements by teachers facilitates e-learning processes that are not happening in a face-to face form.	
Chronemic	Teachers must comply the role of time and its management.	
Facial Expressions	The facial expressions highlighted by the teacher are supported by multimedia elements such as vivid visuals.	There are similarities of NVC skills that need to be practiced between the traditional classroom and virtual.
Oculesics	Eye contact should be consistent with video recording. However, it does not occur during teaching listening skills using audio because only audio is used for that purpose.	
Paralinguistic	The quality of teacher's video recording determines the variations of sound such as high and low voice. Therefore, teachers need to maintain the quality of the recording or remind students to use the speakers/headphones, also the equipment is functioning well.	
Haptic	No haptic or physical contact between teacher and students in e-learning process.	
Proxemics	There is no distance between teacher and students when communicating because they only use electronic devices such as mobile phones or computers.	There are differences of NVC skills that need to be practiced between the traditional classroom and virtual.
Art factual	The teaching and learning process takes place anywhere through e-learning, no furniture layout required. But students may apply a comfortable zone like choosing to be at home, computer lab, cafe or somewhere else.	
Olfactic	This NVC skill is not implemented and is not relevant to distance learning.	

capable of providing teaching materials, relevant learning resources and unlimited online discussions beyond time and space.

Based on the desire to be the catalyst in the mainstream of the educational system, Arabic Language teachers need to be innovative and creative in establishing effective communication with the students. This is in line with [Rozaini Tukimin, Nik Mohd Rahimi, Harun Baharudin and Fariah Hussain \(2018\)](#) that teachers should not only use their knowledge of the subject and pedagogy but also use technology to facilitate the learning process, as well as creative and innovative in face-to-face or virtual classroom. Therefore, this study concludes that:

- 1) Modules and teaching aids should be prepared in advance for the syllabus

to be completed as per the Annual Teaching Plan. At the same time, it can overcome the problems faced by teachers when conducting relief classes due to knowledge gaps, areas and lack of appropriate teaching aids. The readiness of MOE, school administrators, teachers and IT infrastructure experts are essential for the preparation of these materials so that the stated goals can be achieved.

2) NVC skills offer the value of teachers' and students' time in the traditional classroom when the skills are being practiced effectively. This benefit can be realized optimally when the awareness to inculcate NVC skills among Arabic Language teachers starts from the beginning (traditional classroom) before begins in the virtual classroom.

3) E-learning with the help of NVC skills effectively generates an equal opportunity among students to participate in every single discussion in the classroom. Here, smart students have the opportunity to respond, as well as the average and weak students. Indirectly, a culture of collaboration or collaborative learning between smart students and other groups to understand the subjects appear. It has also been proven by previous studies that it is possible to detect the strengths and weaknesses of students in a classroom with different backgrounds of students.

4) NVC skills are only widely known in a daily conversation. In contrast to TLFP, it occurs in a formal conversation. Therefore, teachers do not realize that they do not practice NVC skills in order to convey the syllabus just by holding textbooks in their hands.

5) NVC skills should be implemented in conjunction with verbal communication among Arabic Language teachers to achieve effective language teaching objectives. This is because teachers need to practice NVC skills through various stimulation and symbols in the language teaching. For example, [Aisah Hasmam, Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusoff, Maimun Aqsha Lubis and Aisyah Sjahrony, 2017](#), suggested that teachers must strive to help students understand the meaning of words through both stimulations, verbally and non-verbally involving pictures and figures.

6) With NVC skills also, teachers can inculcate higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) among students to explore and do experiments during learning time. This is based on situations where verbal communication or direct translation is applied at all times; instead, teachers use NVC skills to help students to achieve the subject's objectives.

7) Multimedia elements such as video and audio are suitable to create an edutainment of TLFP. This has been proven in many previous studies such as students' preference to use video application while communicating with their teachers using social media and they gave positive responses to complete their task ([Rahimi, Norul'Azmi, Normeza, & Baharudin, 2015](#)).

## 5. Conclusion

The importance of NVC skills in teaching should be taken seriously as it is a field of communication related to the activity or process of disseminating know-



ledge and skills. In Arabic Language teaching, for instance, NVC skills are seen to be a strategy for assessing teachers in their effectiveness of teaching, students' level of understanding and motivation towards the language. Therefore, the NVC skills in Arabic Language teaching either through traditional classroom and virtual must have a positive impact on parties, teachers and students. Teachers need to inculcate NVC practices when the new age of teaching and learning in education is constantly changing as the Industrial Revolution 4.0 takes place. This is in line with the objectives of developing new innovation to save costs and time, improve quality of work, efficiency, teaching effectiveness and productivity and increase customers' satisfaction in the public and non-profit based sectors (Rozaini Tukimin et al., 2018) such as sustainable education services.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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