

Swati Mazta

2015phden05@curaj.ac.in

Dr. Sanjay Arora

sanjayarora@curaj.ac.in

# Integrating Non-verbal Communication and Verbal Communication for Developing English Communication Skills among Primary School Children

## Abstract

*Nonverbal communication (NVC) is a wordless communication. Consciously and unconsciously we make use of NVC in our life. It is a communication of gestures and postures through which we communicate silently. These messages are considered to be more genuine and powerful. NVC is a basic part of communication used in the classroom but it is always ignored by the teachers as they are not aware of its importance. Majority of the population of Himachal Pradesh resides in rural or remote areas. People mostly communicate in mother tongue and Hindi and school teachers teach English through the grammar translation method (GTM). English is the language of opportunity but young learners residing in remote areas of Himachal Pradesh do not get the environment to learn and speak the language. This paper tries to establish the importance of using NVC and suggests some ways of how NVC can be used in the classroom along with verbal communication (VC) by the teachers which will help to develop English communication skills among primary students in India in general and Himachal Pradesh in particular.*

**Keywords:** Nonverbal communication, Verbal communication, Grammar translation method, Mother tongue, Learning environment, English communication skills

## Introduction

Communication is a basic part of our lives. We communicate to exchange and share our thoughts, beliefs, ideas, emotions, knowledge, and skills with others. Communication involves transfer of a message or a piece of information from the sender via a selected channel to the receiver by overcoming lexical and syntactical barriers. This process begins with the sender who has an idea which he/she encodes in the message. Subsequently, the message gets communicated through one or more of the following ways - spoken mode, written communication, video and audio transmission, electronic transmission and non-verbal communication (NVC) such as body language, gestures and expressions. Finally, the receiver sends feedback to the sender. This is how the cycle of communication

gets completed and the message is meant to be successfully delivered.

Broadly, communication is divided into two major categories - verbal and nonverbal. According to Penrose and others, "verbal communication (VC) consists of sharing thoughts thought the meaning of words." So, VC is the process of exchange of information or message between two or more persons through written or oral words. On the other hand (Huszti, 2013) defines nonverbal communication (NVC) as a paralinguistic and non-linguistic messages that can be transmitted in conjunction with language or without the aid of language; paralinguistic mechanisms include intonation, stress, rate of speech, and pauses or hesitation; non linguistics behaviour include gestures, facial expressions, and body language, among others. According to Giri (2009).

“A pioneer in the field of nonverbal communication, Ray Birdwhistell, suggested that most human communication occurs through gestures, postures, positions, and distance. He described a 65 to 35% split between actions and words. Albert Mehrabian, a well-known expert in nonverbal communication, conducted a study on the relationships among the three elements of communication: the verbal, the vocal, and the visual. The verbal refers to the words that are spoken, the message. The vocal refers to the intonation, projection, and resonance of the voice through which the message is conveyed. The visual depicts the nonverbal behaviours while speaking. Mehrabian noted that impact of communication across the three forms as verbal, 7% (words); vocal, 38% (tone of voice, inflection); and visual, 55% (nonverbal physical behaviours)”.

NVC can stand all alone to express meaning and it can also sync well with verbal communication to deliver speech or present oneself more appropriately. Allan Pease (1988) considers NVC as a complex process involving people’s gesture and body language. Extending it further, Knapp (1978 as cited in Knott, 1979) further adds tactilism (touching behaviour), paralanguage (pitch, stress, intonation and voice quality), proxemics (distance or space), and artefacts (clothing, cosmetic aids) or environmental factors like time, place, climate, noise, and smell to the list of NVC.

Most of the researchers in the past have also found that for a major part of the class teaching time, the communication that happens is NVC but teachers themselves are not conscious of it or simply ignore it. The value of NVC is also underestimated because some teachers either lack the skill of interpreting the non-verbal cues or they do not value them. (Work & Boilean, 1981; Griffin, 1985; Hong-li, 2011; Muchemwa, 2013). So, NVC is underrated as it is not put to optimum use by the teachers in the classroom. The main focus of this paper is on how teachers can use NVC such as gestures, expressions, voice effects and body movements in the classroom for teaching and

developing communication skills in English among primary school students in India in general and Himachal Pradesh in particular.

## English in the Classroom

In recent years, English has been introduced in government schools of Himachal Pradesh (a state located in the north of India) from class one onwards because all over the country, irrespective of rural or urban areas, need for communication in English and ability to communicate fluently has started being felt. English, in the globalised world, has gained greater importance in commerce, social mobility, science and technology and many other fields. Hence, larger number of users wants to interact and communicate with one another successfully.

But the irony is that about 90% of the population of the state lives in remote-rural areas and is dependent upon agriculture as it is the main source of income and employment. Other than agriculture, the most important part of the economy is horticulture, hydropower and tourism. Hindi and English are the official languages of Himachal Pradesh. However, the majority of the population speaks Hindi and Himachali language. As most of the people reside in rural areas and cannot afford to send their children to English medium schools therefore parents want their children to learn and study in nearby Hindi medium schools. Some of these schools just have one teacher who teaches all the subjects. According to Himachal Pradesh Development Report (p.149), there are 1336 single-teacher primary schools and nearly 25% of them are untrained. Parents want their children to have native like fluency in English. But in reality this remains a dream because English is taught merely as a subject and that too through GTM (Grammar Translation Method). Through rote learning children memorise words, grammar rules and answers; language is not learnt or taught as a skill. Due to this style of teaching most of the learners do tend to score better grades in their examinations but their ability

to speak English remains low. Therefore most of the learners have difficulty in talking in English and are unable to use it for oral communication.

Teaching English has become one of the most important and crucial goals for schools and teachers. Communication in English in Himachal Pradesh is a major problem and is seen as a complex drawback of not being understood or always being misunderstood. On the other hand, poor communication leads students nowhere; their ability to send and receive messages is not up to the mark. In the state, most of the learners are good in writing and reading skills but they are deficient in communicating in English because most of the time the teacher teaches the class through GTM. Due to this learners do not get a chance to speak in the class and at the same time, when a teacher teaches or explains in the target language (i.e. English) then learners find it difficult to grasp. Many teachers rely on verbal words to instruct the classroom to convey meaning. Therefore, most of the instructions in the classrooms are in verbal; the teacher talking time is more than that of the students; basically, it is a teacher-centred classroom because of which the participation of students is negligible and their comprehension level also remains low. Therefore, these young learners just rely on nonverbal cues of the teachers because of their limited verbal skills and vocabulary in the subject.

### **Role of Teacher and NVC in the Classroom**

The role of the teacher is an immensely complex one and communication makes the difference. A teacher plays a very important role in and outside the classroom and acts as a caring parent and an expert learner with knowledge and skills. At a glance, the teacher can recognise students and identify the attentive and interested and distinguish them from the dull and lethargic ones in the class. For this the teacher needs to act actively and show enthusiasm towards

teaching and create a positive learning environment. In the classroom, enthusiastic teachers keep on bringing innovation in their teaching styles through which they engage students, make them feel interested and energetic to learn what they are being taught even if they are teaching in the class. A teacher having good communication skills leaves an everlasting impression on the students, both through VC and NVC. Then only teaching-learning of all four skills of English, viz, LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) can be possible and students can be expected to communicate in English. For this, the teacher can and should make use of L1 (mother tongue) in teaching English. L1 can help to clear the meaning of the English words and lead to much better understanding of the context. Besides this, when using English in the classroom to explain some idea or narrate a story, the teacher should make use of body language, gesture or expressions which will help to make the meaning clearer.

In order to support children to learn English, the teachers need to be fluent and highly competent in their communication skills and proficiently use both VC and NVC in the classroom. It has been observed that in the school, teachers do not know or simply ignore the use of NVC whereas the fact is that body language can support VC and compliment teaching skills because it is the language of expressions and emotions, through which communication takes place between the students and the teachers. Integration of NVC (Nonverbal Communication) and VC (Verbal Communication) in the class can drive away boredom and improve the receptivity of the students. Though verbal communication is a primary way of instruction but too much of verbal communication by the teacher in the class neither make students attentive nor active; rather it makes the class boring as students force themselves to listen to the teacher and they lose their interest in the lesson. Teaching in a monotonous way makes class uninteresting and unexciting. Therefore, if teachers use variation in their

tone and pitch and supplement VC with NVC like eye movement, hand movement, standing posture, it will help them to convey their message clearly, and this will make the class interesting and lively. By maintaining eye contact with every student, the teacher can be sure they are listening actively and physically and mentally present in the class. By scanning the class with their eyes teachers can also read students' facial expressions and body language to determine mood of the class, check discipline behaviour and to judge whether the students understand the lesson and have some queries to clear. Teacher's mobility in the classroom is also important as it allows the teacher to know what all students are doing and it maintains discipline and eliminates disturbances before they take place in the class.

NVC is important in the classroom because these young learners in primary schools rely mostly on body language and to encourage them for learning teachers should show enthusiasm through facial expressions, gestures and exciting tone of voice. The point is substantiated by Yang (2017) who is of the view that, "In classroom teaching, NVC is more important than the verbal one. When teaching, teachers will try their best to arouse the student's interest in learning English. Body language as a secondary means of teaching English is vivid, it can warm up the class atmosphere, help students to understand the point, shorten the distance between the teacher and students, stir the interest of learning English, improving the quality of education." Consciously and unconsciously we make use of NVC but in the classroom teacher need to be aware of using NV cues as consciously as she uses verbal communication (i.e. words) to transmit the message. Miller (1988, p.5) is of the view that "nonverbal messages are likely to be more genuine" but these cannot be controlled as easily as verbal messages. We may control our emotions, but our body movements cannot hide anything; they disclose everything to everybody. The teacher needs to understand the power of

NVC in the classroom and they should try to improve their NVC skills to improve students' performance. Use of NV cues in the classroom can motivate or demotivate the students. But on the other hand, teachers' expectations are always linked to encouraging their students through gestures, head nods, eye contact, smile, tone of voice and slightly lean towards the student to listen to their thoughts. In this regards Tai (2014) rightly says, "Body language is one of the rich expressive languages in teaching language, especially English teaching".

Hansen (2010) explained in her article that teachers need to be more than just words. They need to keep a check on the nonverbal message that they are sending to students through proximity, eye contact, gestures, and touch. She is of the view that proximity can be used by teachers to enhance their classroom communication. The teachers should act as facilitators and increase accessibility, build respect and relationship, and keep a record of student's academic and behavioural progress. This way the teachers can focus entirely on what a particular student is trying to communicate. The teacher should maintain eye contact with all the students to ensure they are with him/her, participating in all activities, and in the process understanding the lesson. On the other hand, the teacher can use a hand gesture to pass the information and use attention-getting signals like gesture, eye-contact in the classroom. As there are several gestures, some are universal and some are unique. Therefore during classroom teaching gestures should be used carefully.

In Himachal Pradesh, learning to speak in English seems to be quite challenging for students. Children hesitate to speak in English due to fear of committing errors, and because of the anxiety of being punished or getting scolded in front of the whole class, the students remain silent, making no eye contact with the teacher. "Eye contact can indicate a willingness to communicate or learn. Lack of contact might show a lack of interest or indicate that a student does not

know the answer to a question” (Grubaugh, 1989). At this particular time the teacher should stimulate every student’s passion for learning by interacting with them, create an atmosphere in the class where students are motivated, and feel interested in learning. The teacher can also use space and artefacts in the class to create a good learning environment, and build good relationship with the learners. The last point of discussion is some strategies that can be used in teaching English communication using NV in the classroom to the primary students.

### Some Strategies of Using NVC in the Classroom

Students belonging to rural parts of Himachal Pradesh are good in copying and reading memorised text but lack in speaking skill which is one of the most important skills to be developed as it open gates to communicate with others and is an eligibility criterion for higher education and or employment. It is observed that students from rural area are shy, introvert, less confident, slow and hesitant in speaking. To develop students’ ability to speak teachers should help them to overcome these situations. Classroom is a place for learners where they learn things by making mistakes and the teacher being mentor, guides, supports and give direction. Some strategies that can be used to teach English communication using NVC in the classroom are as follows:

- Body language - Positive body language can foster and assist the student’s interest in learning speaking skills in English. The teachers should not only use appropriate body language themselves in the class but also encourage students to make use of it while speaking. They should encourage and motivate every student to participate in class activities like reading aloud, role-play, pantomime, etc, which require effective use of body languages. These activities will help in breaking the barrier of unfamiliarity and

it will help in forming better connections and relationships with teacher and students. These activities cannot only help them to speak and perform better but also help them to gain confidence, and decrease their nervousness or phobia.

- Young learners love to sing songs, poems, little rhymes and dance. They are fascinated towards music and rhyming words which help the learners to develop listening and speaking skills. Teaching poems or rhymes to primary students by using hand gesture, facial expressions and body movements can generate interest and motivate them to mime the teacher to learn and speak English better. For example, in a poem ‘All about me’ by Larry Schultz (Appendix A) in this the teacher can teach students about the parts of the body by performing actions and showing visually ten fingers, ten toes, two ears, one nose, two eyes, and two lips. Afterwards, the students can be asked to perform by asking them to ‘touch your nose,’ ‘touch your ears,’ ‘touch your eyes,’ and more which will improve their visual and kinaesthetic skills. Similarly, Kids ‘Good-bye song’ (Appendix B) this song can be sung by giving the tune of Happy Birthday. In this song, teachers can teach students to repeat the word ‘good-bye’ and wave ‘good-bye’ by opening hand palm keeping the palm facing out and moving wrist first to the right side then to the left side. Later students can be asked to repeat after teacher words and perform accordingly. In this regard, learners engage their whole body movement in the learning process, get familiar with new words and also increase their focus and attention.
- Other activities like acting out a word or phrase can also be taught. It can be beneficial to learn spoken English. Handouts of scripted one word or phrase like brush your teeth, read a book, drink milk, jumping rope, sleeping, keep quiet, dancing, etc can be used with the students. They can be asked to form a pair accord-

ing to the given script and rehearse their respective parts and thereafter act them out in front of the class. From this activity, students will gain confidence and the teacher, by providing NV feedback (nodding of the head, eye contact, smile, pat on the back) will be able to boost the students. Through this, children will develop a habit of practising daily and improve their speaking skills.

- Paralanguage – According to Alessandra Padula (729, encyclopaedia of communication theory), the term paralanguage (or vocalics) refers to the vocal but non-verbal dimension of communication that characterise the utterance of verbal sequences—for example, stress, pitch, rate, rhythm, volume, and presence of pauses. For instance, simple story reading and story-telling with a lesson and having little vocabulary can be an effective and excellent method in developing all the four language skills among students as there is immense scope of combining both NVC and VC. Moreover, children are always fascinated by storytellers. They enjoy stories in print, audio and audio-visual form. Storytelling is one of the most powerful and appealing tools for learners to develop language-learning skills. Good storytellers use expressive gestures, mimic the characters and make facial expressions which aid in conveying feelings, emotions or moods and actions quite effectively through TPR (Total Physical Response) as it is also part of NVC. They use variation of tone and voice to modulate to emphasise expressions that accompany and explain the action in the story and also use sound effects of laughter, sadness, sounds of birds chirping, gurgling of water, whistling of train and many more; they also use hand gestures to explain directions of moving things to give a real dramatic effect and also make use of body movements to describe characters of the story and their physical features in the story. A good storyteller makes eye contact with every child to build a rapport with the class and makes the class interesting and lively. This develops learners' interest and motivates them to mimic and retell the story to their friends and family members which improves their communicative competence and vocabulary.
- On the other hand, making use of facial expressions like smile, maintaining eye contact, and using hand gestures will make students feel confident, and comfortable and decrease their hesitation and nervousness. Similarly, voice modulation, bodily actions and gesture or expression can be useful in teaching the opposite of the words (Appendix C). For example, 'stress' can be given to indicate the size or to hint at something like making the action 'big' (loud voice) in a big ball and 'small' (soft voice) in a small ball.
- Gesture or expression—Activity cards/flashcards too can be used to teach the vocabulary of gesture, expressions, emotions, names (vegetables, fruits, colours, animals, etc.) and many more which will help them to retain words easily. One flashcard (with a picture on one side and word on the other) can be distributed to each student. One set of students shows the picture on the flashcard to the other set one by one and the latter ones guess the word. If the ones who are guessing fail to identify the picture then they tell the correct answer by flipping it (teacher can help the students to read out the word). Activity cards/flashcards containing the picture and its identification name can be as follows:
  - Gesture - hello, bye-bye, thumbs up(well done), handshake, finger on lips(be quiet).
  - Expressions - angry, happy, sad, bored, hungry, ill, fear
  - Names such as:
    - ✓ Vegetables (ladyfinger, brinjal, pumpkin, potato, tomato, onion, garlic, etc.)
    - ✓ Fruits (apple, banana, grapes, litchi, mango, orange, etc.)

- ✓ Colours (red, blue, green, yellow, black, brown, white)
- Animals (cat, dog, lion, horse, cow, goat, sheep, hen, monkey, fish)

In this way, teachers can help primary students to teach English communication through actions and can build their vocabulary easily and in a simple manner.

## Conclusion

Hence NVC plays a pivotal role in effective classroom communication provided the teacher is aware of its importance. It can enhance teaching and learning of English language as a skill. This can be made more interesting through body movements, activities, or pictures for young children. For better results, and to develop determination and zeal among primary students in the classroom towards oral communication, teachers can use appropriate NVC. Speaking skills can be developed through various activities which are combination of NVC and VC, such as music and rhymes, retelling a

story for speaking, activity cards, opposite of words, and more. Through these activities students can easily learn, understand and improve their communication abilities.

In the context of teaching communication skills, it can be recommended that teachers should be encouraged to use symbols, gestures, expressions, body movement appropriately in the classroom to develop interest and draw attention of the class. Post recruitment training and in-service teacher programme should be organised for teachers' to enhance their knowledge and skills about gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, as they convey meaning and develop better understanding. Teacher training workshops and orientation courses should be regular and they should be trained to use body language effectively, and get introduced to new pedagogical and classroom processes to deal with young children who are developing their linguistic and cognitive ability. Teachers should also be trained to teach English for Specific Purpose, learn phonetics to ensure correct pronunciation in the class, and make the class more develop student-centred.

## References

- Giri, V. N. (2009). Nonverbal communication theories. *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, 690-694.
- Griffin, V. O. (1985). A survey of the use of nonverbal communication by primary teachers in class management.
- Grubaugh, S. (1989). Non-verbal language techniques for better classroom management and discipline. *The High School Journal*. 73 (1) 34-40. Retrieved from [https://www.jstor.org/stable/40364860?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/40364860?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)
- Hansen, J. (2010). Teaching without talking. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 92 (1), 35-40. Retrieved from [https://www.jstor.org/stable/25753625?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25753625?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)
- Himachal Pradesh Development Report, State Plan Division, Planning Commission, Government of India (p.135-154) Retrieved from [http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/state-plan/sdr\\_hp/sdr\\_hpch7.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/state-plan/sdr_hp/sdr_hpch7.pdf)
- Hong-li, P. (2011). Effects of non-verbal communication on college English classroom teaching. *US-China Foreign Language*, 9(8), 505-516.
- Husztai, I. (2013). Glossary on language teaching and learning. *Beregszasz: Finland*.
- Kids - ESL Kids Songs: Good-Bye Song. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://esl-kids.com/songs/goodbyesong.html>
- Knott, G. (1979). Nonverbal communication during early childhood. *Theory Into Practice*. 18 (4), 226-233. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/1476648](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1476648)
- Miller, P. (1988). *Nonverbal communication*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association.

- Muchemwa, S. (2013). Use of nonverbal communication in the classroom as a way of enhancing classroom teaching: A case study of Solusi high school, Zimbabwe. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 103(10), 1279-87.
- Padula, A. (2009). Nonverbal communication theories. *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, 729-731.
- Pease, A. (1988). *Body language*. London: Sheldon Press.
- Penrose & Others. The Business Communication, By, & The Business Communication. (2019, October 23). What is verbal communication and non-verbal communication? Retrieved from <https://thebusinesscommunication.com/what-is-verbal-communication-and-non-verbal-communication/>
- Schultz, L. (2010, August 13). Poem no. 2: All about me. Retrieved from <https://iselschultz.wordpress.com/poem-no-2-all-about-me/>.
- Tai, Y. (2014). The Application of body language in english teaching. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. 5 (5), 1205-1209 ACADEMY PUBLISHER. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4598/fa15587aaa44a40ff4088bff1439feff139f.pdf>
- Work, W., & Boileau, D. M. (1981). Eric report: Nonverbal communication: Classroom influence and topic. *Communication Education*, 30(3), 305-310. doi: 10.1080/03634528109378486
- Yang, X. (2017). The Use of body language in english teaching. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 7(12), 1333-1336, ACADEMY PUBLICATION, Retrieved from <http://www.academy-publication.com/ojs/index.php/tpls/article/download/tpls071213331336/1350>

## Appendix A

All About Me by Larry Schultz

Ten little finger,

Ten little toes.

Two little ears

And one little nose.

Two little eyes,

That shine so bright.

Two little lips

To kiss you goodnight.

(Source: <https://iselschultz.wordpress.com/poem-no-2-all-about-me/>)

## Appendix B

Good-Bye Song

Good-bye to you,

Goo-bye to you,

Good-bye dear friends,

I'll see you again.

(Source: <https://esl-kids.com/songs/goodbyesong.html>)



## Appendix C

### Opposite of the Words

- I say a **BIG** ball, and you say a **SMALL** ball.
- I say **STOP**, and you say **GO**.
- I say its **NEW** ball, and you say its **OLD** ball.
- I say come **IN**, and you say go **OUT**.
- I say run **FAST**, and you say run **SLOW**.
- I say its **DARK**, and you say its **LIGHT**.
- I say **HOT** tea, and you say **COLD** ice-cream.
- I say **OPEN** the door, and you say **CLOSE** the door.
- I say **SOFT** ball, and you say **HARD** bat.
- I say **LAUGH**, and you say **CRY**.
- I say **SIT** down, and you say **STAND** up.
- I say **YES**, and you say **NO**.
- I say come **NEAR**, and you say go **FAR**.
- I say you are a **BOY**, and you say you are a **GIRL**.