

## A study on facilitative role of body language in the Iranian English as a foreign language learners' achievement

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to study on facilitative role of body language in Iranian learners' achievement. The participants in this study were 40 students of level one studying in Language Institution. They were both male and female classes whose their levels of education were approximately the same because they were beginners of English learning, ranging in age from 8 to 13 years. The researcher wanted to find if there was facilitative role of body language in Iranian learners' achievement. To obtain the required data pre- test and post-test were used: The two-ways analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to analyze results. Through the two-way ANOVA, the researcher could compare the effects of body language on learning of words in the participants. The results of the study suggested that there was a positive significant relationship between these variables. The results showed significant differences between experimental and control groups displaying that experimental group outperformed control group.

**Keywords:** EFL Learner, Body Language, Gesture, Nonverbal communication

### 1. Introduction

Body language refers to various forms of nonverbal communication, where in a person reveals clues as to some unspoken intention or feeling through their physical behavior. These behaviors can include body posture, gestures, facial expressions, and eye movements (Ekman, 1990) [29].

Nonverbal communication plays an important role in second language communicative competence, yet little attention has been given to practical teaching techniques that will help English language teachers incorporate this essential element into their classroom. Teachers' gestures can play an important role in the classroom. They can improve communication between the teachers and learners and facilitate learners' understanding of what the teachers say. Aspiration of teachers in EFL classrooms are to challenge learners to go beyond the grammaticality of being able to put the subject, verb, and object in the correct syntactic order, and achieve what Canale and Swain (1980) [16, 20] called discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic competencies.

Most Iranian English teachers have been faced an inevitably linguistic phenomenon during their experience of teaching English under an EFL context. Body language is an important part of how people communicate and there are differences from culture to culture. There are many differences in languages and cultures between native speakers of Persian and native speakers of English. Understanding culture and its variations is not always easy. Social scientists tell us that cultures differ from one another, that each culture is unique.

Teachers cannot use any gesture to learning in classroom because there are a number of gestures commonly used in the United States that may have a different meaning and/or be offensive to those from other cultures. Although body language has some valuable advantages to learners in teaching English as a foreign language but teachers ignore gestures and movements of body to improve learning, because teachers don't have knowledge about other cultures also, using of

gestures is unusual in classes and teachers try to have formal classrooms.

Despite the fact that many English teachers don't use body language under an English context where English is learned and taught as a foreign language; current study aims to clarify the effective using of body language in classes.

In recent years there has been a great focus on the facilitative aspect of body language where a foreign language was to be developed. The present research aims to explore the Iranian EFL learners' opinions and strategies about the use of body language and gestures in learning.

The finding of this study can be of great assistance to foreign language instructors and also for teachers and learners in an EFL context. Firstly, teachers can use the results of the present study to improve the learning by utilizing the body language and gestures in EFL classes. Also, learners can reap benefits from the results of this study to develop motivation, to help fixing language in minds, to avoid misunderstandings, to encourage learners through an intensive focus on meaning, and to pass proficiency tests. The purpose of the present study is to evaluate the effect of using gestures on language development in children as symbols for objects, requests, and conditions. The current work aims at identifying and analyzing the advantages of using body language during instruction for EFL learners. The results will indicate an affirmative answer.

Studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of gestures in instruction on learning among EFL learners. Body language in instruction is a new field which has recently attracted the researchers' attention. In order to present a new, practical and valid teaching method, the present study is an attempt to recognize the role of body language training in improving Iranian learners' achievement.

In addition, answering the following mentioned questions is the main focus of this study.

This study addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent is the role of body language important in

the developing learning in EFL classroom?

2. To what extent does this study help teachers make more appropriate use of gestures among EFL learners?

### 1.1 Theoretical framework

This research is based on Baits' Model (2004). According to Bait gesture is a form of non-verbal communication whose meaning is conveyed by use of the body. Teachers' gestures can play an important role in classrooms; they can improve communication between the teachers and learners, and facilitate learners' understanding of what the teachers say. He found that gestures raised teachers' awareness and learners' achievement in classrooms.

The participants were five teachers of English in a Cycle 2 Basic Education school in Oman. The school populations were about 500 students. All the teachers had been teaching English for at least ten years and he was their senior teacher of English. This study had elements of action with reference to use of gestures and movements of body by teachers. He was concerned with "trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge.

Based on the data collected he noticed that teachers B, D and E seemed to use appropriate gestures and their gestures reinforced what they said orally and did not cause problems for students to understand them. In contrast, teachers A and C seemed to use gestures less effectively; their gestures confused the students and did not match what they said in the classrooms. He concluded that the effective use of gestures by teachers of English can undoubtedly enhance both teaching and learning. Using of gestures is thus an important topic for teachers to reflect on, become aware of and learn about. This study explored ways of engaging teachers in these processes. He concluded that the teachers who participated in this work did benefit; the study also confirmed his belief that teachers can consciously learn to use gestures more effectively in the classrooms.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 40 students of level one studying in Shokohe -Derakhshan Language Institution in Dezful, Khoozestan. They were both male and female subjects whose levels of education were approximately the same because they were beginners of English learning, ranging in age from 8 to 13 years.

The students were informed that they were selected to participate in a research, and they agreed to do so. They also allowed the data collected to be used anonymously.

They were randomly assigned to two experimental and control groups. Then the experimental group received instructions of body language and gesture to learn English according to the objective of the study but the control group received no instructions.

### 2.2 Instruments

#### 2.2.1 Proficiency Test

For the purpose of the study several instruments were utilized. Proficiency test was used to be one of the important instruments which was related in almost all investigations which were related to FL learning. By using proficiency test the four groups were certainly homogeneous in term of their FL proficiency. Then students were randomly divided to

experimental and control groups.

#### 2.2.2 Piloting the Placement Test

The first step was to pilot the test which was used to make sure that all groups were equal and belonged to the same population in terms of their general English proficiency. Therefore, the objective sections of the test comprising: listening, reading 20 items and speaking test and grammar with 30 items were administered to 40 subjects with the same qualities as those of the main study. To ensure the homogeneity of the participants, a norm-referenced placement test of the *Let's Go* (Nakata, Frazier, Hoskins, 2006) [62] which included listening test, a placement test of Cambridge University Press (2009), included reading test and a placement grammar test of (<http://www.Englishexercises.org>) and Oxford University Press (2010) [80] and Ireland Duo Design, (2006) which included an oral interview (speaking) were administered to the participants. In its multiple-choice section, the test contained 20 items of listening, 20 items reading, and 20 items grammar test and 20 items speaking test.

The listening, reading, grammar test and speaking sections of this test had already been piloted with 40 students studying as beginners of English learning and giving whole test a maximum score of 100. In order to determine the level of the speaking grammatical accuracy of the participants both in the subject selection and in the post-test, the researcher conducted the interviews for 10 minutes using the *Let's Go* Passages Placement Testing Program which included the conversation placement test as well as its assessment scale.

Every interview was recorded and subsequently rated by the researcher. Each sentence received a point varying from zero, for a very ungrammatical overall structure, to two, for a very well structured compound or complex sentence. These points were added up by the rater at the end of listening to the recording of the interview and a final score of each participant's grammatical accuracy in speaking was thus achieved.

#### 2.2.3 Pre-test and post- test

The pre-test as well as the post-test were used to avoid any inequality between them. Every item was graded dichotomously: one point for a correct answer, zero for an incorrect one.

### 2.3 Procedure

Before data collection could proceed, researcher spent about five to ten minutes at the beginning of the class time to explain about body language and gestures to the students and also spoke to them about the purpose of this study and to increase the truthfulness of the students to answers, requested them to be sincere in their answers. Then, they were given the necessary instructions as how to answer each question.

Since the researcher needed to select and homogenize the participants of the study, they first embarked on piloting the listening, reading, and grammar test and speaking sections of the norm-referenced placement test related to beginner level described above with 40 beginners of English learning in Shokohe-Derakhshan Language Institution. Subsequently, the test was administered to the 40 target participants who were beginners of English learning, Language Institution in Dezful. The results of the test indicated that all the participants at this level were homogeneous. Thus, they were randomly assigned

to two different groups: one control group, including 20 females and males, and one experimental group, consisting of 20 females and males.

The speaking test was used for the subject selection process at the outset. The post-test in this study was vocabulary test in forms written and speaking, the model presented by (Nakata 2006) [62] of the *Let's Go*. Each interview lasted 5 minutes starting with the interviewer introducing himself/herself, Giving a little background of what s/he did s/he had been studying English.

The instructional intervention consisted of 18 sessions of 90 minutes each, which spread out over three weeks. The course was intensive with two sessions a day held three days a week. Experimental group of male and female participants received use instructions of body language and gesture to learn English according to objective of the study but the other control group of male and female participants received no instructions.

In order to make all students speak and produce language and to give equal opportunity to all subjects to have output in English during the treatment, interactions were in the person-to-person form; that is to say the teacher had interaction with all the students in each session. As a result, the participants were given equal chance to have output and receive feedback on their production accordingly.

At the end of the instruction period, the subjects were interviewed once again in a post-test (exactly with the same procedure explained above) to track any possible improvement in new vocabulary in their speaking with respect to both the kind of correction they received throughout the treatment period and the way male and female participants reacted to the two types of correction they received. The study was accomplished during 18 sessions of 90 minutes each, which spread out over three weeks. This study had elements of action research with reference to use of body language and gestures in an educational course.

## 2.4 Design

### 2.4.1 Data collection

The current study employed the experimental method which is basically a collection of research designs, guidelines for using them, principles and procedures for determining significance, and criteria for determining the quality of a study. The special designs used were the *pre-test post-test control group design* that is one of the true experimental designs.

In first session, the researcher met the participants, talked to them about the study for a few minutes and made them aware of the processes supposed to go through. After the homogeneity of the subjects, 40 students were selected based on their scores on a standard proficiency test. They were randomly assigned to two different groups: one control group, including 20 females and males, and one experimental group, consisting of 20 females and males. 20 students were assigned to one experimental group and 20 to one control group. Experimental group was undertaken the treatment; however the control group wasn't received any instruction. The participants in the experimental group participated in an 18 session strategy training. Each session took 90 minutes which spread out over three weeks.

After the treatment was completed, a vocabulary test with the same level of difficulty was administered to both experimental and control groups to see whether the strategy instruction had any effect on the participants' performance or not. In the last part of the instruction researcher discussed the meaning of gestures in different cultures.

### 2.4.2 Data analysis

After transcribing, organizing and familiarizing oneself with the obtained data, the data were codified, a process which was referred to as open or preliminary coding. Here the researcher detected a wide range of codes regarding the obtained scores in pre-test and post-test. To see if the control and experimental groups are equal in condition before the treatment begins, it was necessary to compare the mean scores of both groups. A pre-requisite to any comparison of two independent means were equality of variances. After it was confirmed that the two groups were at the same level of language proficiency before the treatment, it were time to see whether any changes occurred in the performance of the experimental group after the treatment. To this end, the mean scores of the post-test were compared. The results of the statistical analysis showed no significant difference between mean scores of experimental and control groups. Then the participants' initial scores were compared to the final ones. After the required data were collected, the outcome scores were analyzed by means of Statistic Package of Social Sciences (SPSS).

## 2.5 Administering the Placement Test

The placement test was administered to two groups of this study. It is worth mentioning that the scores of the test in its original form (being the sum of the grammar, speaking, reading, listening in form of multiple-choice sections) maximum of 100, with the assumption that a learner with a below 10 could be considered to be at the beginner level. The insignificant value in placement test showed that 2 groups were at the same level of language proficiency at the beginning of the study.

## 2.6 Comparison of two tests

In order to find out whether there was significant difference between responses of various proficiency level, SPSS software was used. To analyze one way ANOVA was applied for body language and gesture.

After collecting the data, the early step used in analyzing data was organizing the numerical values in term of mean scores. To present clear picture of scores, related bar graphs were provided. These graphs display the competition of 40 learners in performing on the tasks based on the mean values of each variable. Bars are indicative of the change in the learners' performance. As it is evident, there is fluctuation in the performance of participants on learning vocabulary.

Analysis of figure 2.1 and 2.2 crucially reveals that all learners groups (control group and experimental group in pre-test) failed to perform consistently across the items of new vocabulary test (body language and gesture test). Frequency and mean of scores are represented in the figure below.

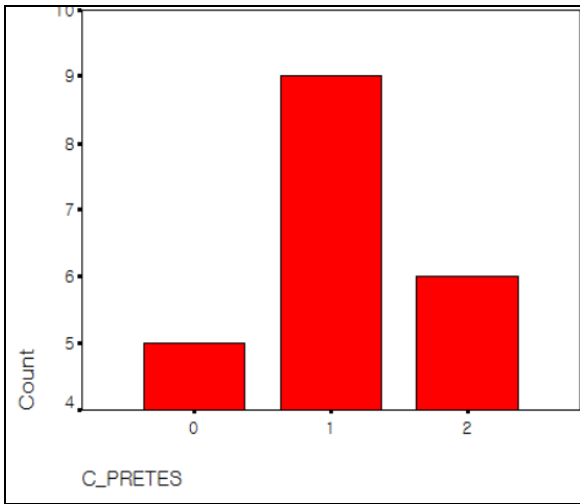


Fig 2.1. The scores of control group in pre-test.

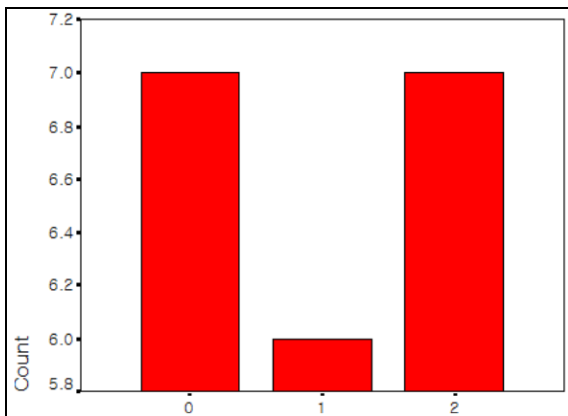


Fig 2.2. The scores of experimental group in pre-test.

Analysis of figure.2.3 and figure.2.4 reveals frequency and mean of scores in control group and experimental group with difference between scores after post-test.

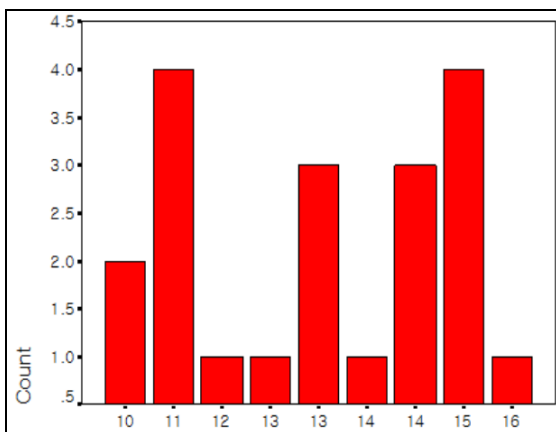


Fig 2.3. The scores of control group in post-test

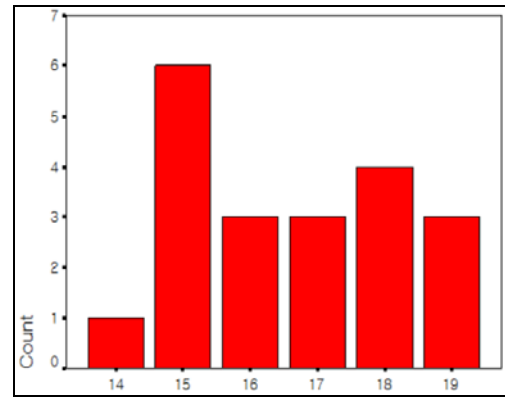


Fig 2.4. The scores of experimental group in post-test

Table 1: Descriptive statistics which were related to two groups in pre and post tests are shown in table 1.

group	pre-test		post-test	
	mean	std. deviation	mean	std. deviation
control	1.05	0.76	12.95	1.82
experimental	1	0.85	16.6	1.6

**Conclusion 1**

The two-ways analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to analyze results.

In statistics, the two-ways analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was an extension of the one-way ANOVA test that examines the influence of different categorical independent variables on one dependent variable. While the one-way ANOVA measures the significant effect of one independent variable, the two-way ANOVA is used when there are more than one independent variable and multiple observations for each independent variable. In this research dependent variable was students' scores and independent variables were groups (control and experimental) and tests (pre and post).

Table 2 The result of two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test is shown as follow:

categorical independent variables	sum of squares	df	mean square	F	significant
groups*tests	68.45	1	68.45	37.91	0.00

The result of the two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test show the influence of groups\*tests on student's scores which was significant, because the value of variable F was 37.91(F=37.91) and the value of variable sig (significant) was 0.00.

This test shows that there was a significant difference between scores of two groups, then it could be concluded that there was significant difference between body language strategy and usual technique.

**Conclusion 2**

The results of paired sample T-test reveal significant differences between the average values of the same measurement made under two different conditions. Both measurements were made on each unit in a sample, and the test was based on the paired differences between these two values. The null hypothesis for the paired sample T-test was  $H_0: d = \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$ . Where  $d$  was the mean value of difference. This null hypothesis tested against one of the following alternative hypotheses, depending on the question posed:

- H1:  $d = 0$
- H1:  $d > 0$
- H1:  $d < 0$

The paired sample T-test was a more powerful alternative to a two sample procedure, such as the two samples T-test, but can only be used when researcher has matched samples. In this test (The paired sample T-test), the students' scores were checked in both pre and post- tests without considering the students in control and experimental groups. It is noteworthy that all of the students were in one group.

**Table 3:** The result of paired sample T-test is shown in table 3.

tests	mean	std. deviation	t	df	sig. (significant)
pre-test	1.02	0.8	32.75	39	0.00
post-test	14.78	2.5			

Table 3 shows there was a significant difference between students' scores which received pre and post-tests ( $sig=0.00$ ) then it could be concluded that experimental group (students training) was effective.

**Conclusion 3**

The independent samples T- test helped researcher to find out the difference between average values in two groups. The independent samples T-test was used when two separate sets of independent and identically distributed samples were obtained, one of the two populations being compared. "T" is calculated under the assumption, called the null hypothesis. The formula for the independent samples T-test is:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{S_{x_1}^2}{n_1 - 1} + \frac{S_{x_2}^2}{n_2 - 1}}} \quad df = (n_1 - 1) + (n_2 - 1)$$

The independent samples T-test revealed influence of groups\*tests on students' scores. The result of independent samples T- test is shown in table 4.

**Table 4**

tests	groups	mean	std. deviation	t	df	sig. (significant)
pre-test	control	1.05	0.76	0.2	38	0.85
	experimental	1	0.85			
post-test	control	12.95	1.83	6.72	38	0.00
	experimental	16.6	1.6			

Table 4 shows there wasn't significant difference between students' scores mean which received pre-test in control and experimental groups ( $sig=0.85$ ) then it could be concluded that the students' knowledge(level) were same in both groups. Table 4 shows significant difference between students' scores mean which received of post-test in control and experimental groups ( $sig=0.00$ ) then it could be concluded that the students' knowledge(level) was unlike in both groups after instruction and use of body language strategy was positively affected by participations in experimental group.

**3. Discussion**

Results of the study body language in EFL learner class showed that, movements of body can undoubtedly enhance learning. In other words, there was meaningful relationship between body language in EFL classroom. According to this study, there was a meaningful relationship between learners' achievement, comprehension, memorization of vocabulary in EFL learners and meaningful relationship between the body language test. Using of body language is thus an important topic for teachers to become aware of this strategy. This research help to teachers to better identify and treat children with developmental disorders and to more successfully communicate with struggling learners. Learning body language is a very difficult task that takes a lot of times and a lot of practices but is a very important step that guarantees success in classes. By using methods and techniques that raise

learners' consciousness about the integral role of body language in achievement a foreign language, researcher focused on learning and memorizing new words. This study explored ways of engaging teachers in these processes. Researcher is confident that the learners who participated in this work did benefit; the study also confirmed that teachers can consciously use gestures more effectively in the classrooms. Several suggestions can be made in this regard. According to Goldin-Meadow (2005) [36] (a) Gesture reflects speakers' thoughts, often their unspoken thoughts, and thus can serve as a window onto cognition. Encouraging speakers to gesture can thus provide another route for teachers to better understand their communication partners. (b) Gesture can change speakers' thoughts. Encouraging gesture thus has the potential to change how students, patients, witnesses, etc., think about a problem and, as a result, alter the course of learning, therapy, or an interchange. (c) Gesture provides building blocks that can be used to construct a language. They found by using of problem-solving nature of movements of body teachers get new and correct problem-solving strategies in instruction. If done, can hugely contribute to achievement of EFL learners and it can help to solve communication problems or enhance learning. This new perspective not only can facilitate the teaching of these crucial aspects of language, but also provides positive wash back effect on L2 teaching activities. This is an important fact for teachers who want to help young learners to acquire a foreign



language. Involving the body in the learning process is therefore relevant in the classrooms.

This study also has implications for teaching materials in language classrooms. Teachers should pay attention to cultures of target language when they want to teach, because gesture varies cross-culturally and cultures vary in (1) conventions for form-meaning associations, (2) cognition, (3) language, and (4) pragmatics of communication. This approach for conceptualizing cross-cultural variation of gesture behaviors is based on the view that gesture is a symbol expressing thought in coordination with speech (e.g., McNeill, 1992) <sup>[59]</sup> and it is an integral part of multi-modal communicative acts (e.g., Kendon, 2004). It is the case that not only language but also gestures play a role in maintenance and transmission of culture-specific cognition (Danziger *et al.*, 2008).

#### 4. Suggestions for Further Research

As the final remark, other studies can be carried out with different focuses. Similar study can be done on other levels or on other foreign languages to distinguish the role of body language on learning different foreign languages. Moreover, because the variable sex was excluded in this study, similar studies can be done with male and female groups to reveal the possible differences between them in this regard, can be found.

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