

**A Comparative Analysis of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication in Classroom
Interaction across English and Urdu in Pakistani Academic Context**

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ABSTRACT

Interaction in the classroom is a complicated process that includes both spoken and unspoken communication. While non-verbal communication comprises posture, tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures, verbal communication includes spoken words such as inquiries, answers, and explanations. For teaching and learning to be effective, both types are essential. This study compares the verbal and nonverbal communication in Pakistani universities that are taught in Urdu and English. Using a mixed-methods research approach, 80 university students were given a questionnaire to complete, which yielded quantitative data in addition to qualitative classroom observations. The results show that while Urdu classrooms use more expressive nonverbal clues and flexible verbal strategies, English classrooms rely more on structured verbal communication with few nonverbal expressions. The study highlights the importance of understanding linguistic and cultural differences in classroom communication to improve teaching practices and learner engagement.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, verbal communication, non-verbal communication, English, Urdu, mixed-methods research

INTRODUCTION

All educational activities are built on communication, but this is especially true in classroom settings where teachers and students engage in constant interaction to teach and learn. In classrooms, information is created through a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication rather than being conveyed solely through spoken words. In addition to using spoken language to convey ideas, pose queries, offer guidance, and offer feedback, teachers often use posture, eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice to bolster and elucidate their points. Students also react nonverbally by nodding, raising their hands, making facial expressions, and moving their bodies in addition to speaking.

The use of words to convey concepts, details, and meanings is referred to as verbal communication. Lectures, discussions, Q&A sessions, explanations, and feedback are all examples of verbal communication in the classroom. It is essential for planning class activities and directing students' education. Conversely, communicating without the use of words is referred to as non-verbal communication. It encompasses paralinguistic elements and bodily actions like posture, movement, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, pauses, and tone of voice. According to research, nonverbal communication can sometimes express meanings more effectively than words alone and frequently reinforces spoken signals.

Language and culture are closely connected, and they strongly influence both verbal and non-verbal communication. Different languages follow different norms of interaction, politeness, formality, and expressiveness. Similarly, cultural values shape how people use body language, eye contact, gestures, and

physical distance. Therefore, classroom interaction in different languages may vary not only in linguistic structure but also in communication style.

Urdu and English are the two most often utilized languages in Pakistani education. At higher education levels, English is frequently employed as a teaching language and is linked to formal academic discourse. The national language, Urdu, is frequently utilized in classrooms and represents regional communication and cultural customs. Teaching methods in English-medium schools are frequently inspired by Western educational traditions, which emphasize more formal, structured, and straightforward communication. On the other hand, South Asian cultural norms have an impact on classes that use Urdu, where communication is typically more relational, contextual, and expressive.

There hasn't been much research done in Pakistan to compare verbal and nonverbal communication styles in English and Urdu classes, despite the significance of both in the classroom. The majority of current research focuses on either spoken classroom conversation or nonverbal communication independently. Studies that compare the two modes across languages and look at them jointly are scarce.

This study aims to fill this research gap by conducting a comparative analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication in English- and Urdu-medium classrooms at the university level. By using a mixed-methods approach, the study not only observes real classroom interaction but also gathers students' perceptions through a questionnaire. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how communication functions in classrooms and how students experience it. The findings of this study are expected to be useful for teachers, researchers, and curriculum designers who aim to improve classroom interaction and teaching effectiveness in multilingual educational contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Verbal Communication in Classroom Interaction

In classroom settings, verbal communication is the main method of instruction and learning. It describes how ideas, information, directions, and feedback are communicated orally. Lectures, explanations, questions, conversations, and assessments of students' answers are all examples of verbal communication in the classroom. Richards and Lockhart (1994) assert that verbal engagement in the classroom is essential for establishing learning opportunities and gauging student participation. Teacher discussion frequently takes precedence over classroom engagement, according to research on classroom discourse, particularly in higher education settings (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).

One of the most common verbal interaction patterns identified in classrooms is the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) structure, where the teacher initiates a question, a student responds, and the teacher provides feedback or evaluation. This pattern is frequently observed in English-medium classrooms, where structured and teacher-centered interaction is common (Walsh, 2011).

In English classrooms, verbal communication is usually formal and academic. Teachers tend to use standard grammar, complete sentences, and subject-specific vocabulary. Students are encouraged to give clear and accurate responses, often in complete sentences. Studies suggest that this style of verbal communication helps develop academic language skills and clarity of expression (McCarthy, 1991). However, it may also limit spontaneous interaction and reduce participation among less confident learners (Ellis, 1994).

In contrast, verbal communication in Urdu-medium classrooms is often more flexible and interactive. Teachers frequently use repetition, paraphrasing, and examples from everyday life to explain complex ideas. Code-switching between Urdu and English is also commonly observed, particularly when teachers explain technical or academic terms (Rahman, 2005). Research conducted in South Asian classroom

contexts suggests that such flexible verbal practices help students understand content more easily and create a supportive learning environment (Shamim, 2008).

Overall, previous studies indicate that verbal communication patterns differ across languages due to differences in linguistic norms, teaching traditions, and educational goals. However, verbal communication alone does not fully explain how meaning is constructed in classrooms, which highlights the importance of non-verbal communication.

Non-Verbal Communication in Classroom Interaction

Non-verbal communication refers to communication without spoken words and includes gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, body movement, pauses, and tone of voice. In classroom settings, non-verbal communication plays a significant role in supporting verbal messages and managing interaction. Mehrabian (1971) argues that a large portion of meaning in communication is conveyed through non-verbal cues, especially when expressing attitudes and emotions.

The impact of teachers' nonverbal communication on learning and persuasion in university classrooms was investigated by Abbas et al. (2025). Eye contact, tone of voice, gestures, and immediate behaviors like smiling and nodding greatly increase student engagement, motivation, and attention, according to the study, which was conducted via surveys and classroom observations. The results demonstrate that in higher education, teachers' persuasive power and trustworthiness are increased through good nonverbal communication.

Research shows that teachers use non-verbal communication to emphasize important points, maintain students' attention, manage classroom discipline, and express encouragement or disapproval (Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2014). For example, hand gestures can help explain abstract concepts, while facial expressions can communicate approval, interest, or dissatisfaction. Eye contact is often used to regulate turn-taking and encourage student participation.

Several studies suggest that non-verbal communication has a strong impact on students' engagement and motivation. Teachers who use effective gestures, expressive facial expressions, and appropriate tone of voice are often perceived as more approachable and supportive (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2016). Non-verbal cues also help reduce learners' anxiety and create a positive classroom atmosphere.

Culture plays a key role in shaping non-verbal behavior. Hall (1976) explains that non-verbal communication varies across cultures in terms of physical distance, eye contact, gestures, and body movement. In many Western classroom contexts, teachers tend to use limited and controlled non-verbal cues, as excessive movement may be viewed as unprofessional. In contrast, South Asian classroom contexts allow and even encourage more expressive body language.

In Urdu-medium classrooms, teachers often use frequent hand movements, changes in tone, smiling, and facial expressions to engage students and clarify meaning. Students also actively use non-verbal signals such as nodding, murmuring agreement, or showing confusion through facial expressions. These practices reflect a culturally expressive and relational communication style (Khan, 2012).

Despite its importance, non-verbal communication has often been treated as secondary in classroom research. Many studies focus primarily on spoken interaction, ignoring how non-verbal cues work together with verbal communication to create meaning.

Language, Culture, and Classroom Communication

Language and culture are deeply interconnected, and this relationship strongly influences classroom interaction. Every language carries its own norms of politeness, formality, directness, and interactional

style. Cultural values shape how teachers and students communicate, behave, and respond in educational settings (Kramsch, 1998).

English, as an international and academic language, is often associated with formal classroom discourse. English-medium classrooms typically emphasize clarity, directness, individual participation, and time management. These features reflect Western educational traditions that prioritize efficiency and structured interaction (Walsh, 2011).

Urdu, as the national language of Pakistan, reflects local cultural values such as respect, relational bonding, and contextual understanding. Urdu-medium classrooms often show closer teacher–student relationships, where communication is more personal and emotionally expressive. Teachers may use stories, humor, and supportive non-verbal cues to maintain students’ interest and involvement (Shamim, 2008).

Previous studies highlight that these cultural differences affect both verbal and non-verbal communication in classrooms. For example, direct questioning and brief responses are common in English classrooms, while indirect explanations and expressive gestures are more common in Urdu classrooms (Rahman, 2005). Understanding these differences is especially important in multilingual contexts like Pakistan, where students are exposed to both English and Urdu as mediums of instruction.

Previous Studies and Research Gap

Although a large body of research exists on classroom discourse and communication, most studies focus either on verbal interaction or non-verbal behavior separately. Comparative studies across languages are also limited, particularly in higher education contexts. In Pakistan, research has mainly focused on language policy, medium of instruction, and teaching methods, rather than classroom communication practices.

Very few studies have examined verbal and non-verbal communication together in English- and Urdu-medium classrooms. Moreover, students’ perceptions of classroom communication are often neglected. This lack of integrated research creates a gap in understanding how communication functions holistically in multilingual classrooms.

The present study addresses this gap by providing a comparative analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication in English and Urdu classrooms, using both classroom observations and questionnaire data from students.

Research Questions

1. What verbal communication strategies are used in English and Urdu classroom interaction?
2. What non-verbal communication features are commonly observed in English and Urdu classrooms?
3. How do verbal and non-verbal communication differ between English and Urdu classroom interaction?

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research Design

This study combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a mixed-methods research design. Classroom observations are the main emphasis of the qualitative component, which looks at teachers' and students' in-the-moment verbal and nonverbal communication. Students' opinions of classroom communication are

gathered using a questionnaire as part of the quantitative component. A more thorough grasp of the verbal and nonverbal communication processes in classrooms that are taught in both English and Urdu is possible through the use of mixed techniques, which also enables data triangulation.

Participants

In the qualitative phase, two university-level classrooms were selected for observation, one English-medium classroom and one Urdu-medium classroom. Both teachers and students in these classrooms participated in the study through natural classroom interaction during teaching sessions. In the quantitative phase, a total of 80 university students participated in the questionnaire survey. These students were enrolled in English- and Urdu-medium classes, ensuring representation from both instructional contexts.

Data Collection Instruments

The main method for gathering qualitative data was classroom observation. In order to document verbal communication patterns, such as instructor discourse, student answers, and questioning techniques, as well as nonverbal behaviors, such as posture, eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures, a number of classroom sessions were observed. Students' opinions of verbal and nonverbal communication in their courses were gathered through the use of a Likert-scale format in a structured questionnaire created for the quantitative data. Aspects including the teacher's use of gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, and general student engagement during class interactions were among the main topics of the questionnaire.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two theoretical perspectives that are widely used to analyze classroom interaction and communication: **Interactional Sociolinguistics** and **Multimodal Discourse Analysis**. These theories provide a strong foundation for examining both verbal and non-verbal communication in English- and Urdu-medium classrooms and help explain how meaning is constructed through language and embodied actions.

Interactional Sociolinguistics, introduced by Gumperz (1982), focuses on how participants use language in social interaction to create meaning. This theory emphasizes the role of contextual cues, conversational strategies, and cultural knowledge in understanding communication. In classroom settings, Interactional Sociolinguistics has been widely used to analyze teacher–student interaction, turn-taking patterns, questioning strategies, and the use of language for instructional purposes. Previous studies have applied this framework to examine classroom discourse across different languages and cultures, showing how linguistic choices reflect social roles, power relations, and cultural norms (Gumperz, 1982; Walsh, 2011). In the present study, this theory helps explain how verbal communication strategies differ between English- and Urdu-medium classrooms and how teachers and students interpret meaning within specific educational and cultural contexts.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis, developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), extends traditional discourse analysis by focusing on multiple modes of communication beyond spoken language. This theory argues that meaning is created through the interaction of various semiotic modes, including speech, gestures, facial expressions, gaze, posture, and spatial organization. Multimodal Discourse Analysis has been extensively used in classroom research to study how teachers use gestures, body movement, and visual cues alongside verbal explanations to support learning. Previous research shows that multimodal resources play a crucial role in maintaining student engagement and clarifying complex concepts (Kress et al., 2005). In this study, Multimodal Discourse Analysis provides a framework for analyzing non-verbal communication and understanding how it complements verbal interaction in English and Urdu classrooms.

By integrating Interactional Sociolinguistics and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this study offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining classroom communication. The combination of these two theories allows for a balanced analysis of spoken language and non-verbal behavior, making it possible to compare how meaning is constructed and communicated in English- and Urdu-medium classroom interaction.

Table 1:

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1. The teacher's verbal explanation is clear and understandable.	26	34	9	7	4	80
2. The teacher explains concepts in an organized verbal manner.	24	36	10	6	4	80
3. Question-answer interaction helps me understand the lesson better.	27	32	11	7	3	80
4. The teacher uses gestures to support verbal explanation.	29	31	9	7	4	80
5. Eye contact by the teacher helps maintain my attention.	25	33	12	6	4	80
6. Facial expressions of the teacher help clarify meaning.	23	35	11	7	4	80
7. The teacher's tone of voice affects my understanding of the lesson.	28	30	10	8	4	80
8. Non-verbal communication makes classroom interaction more engaging.	26	34	8	8	4	80
9. I feel more motivated when teachers use verbal and non-verbal cues.	27	33	9	7	4	80
10. Both verbal and non-verbal communication improve my learning experience.	30	32	8	6	4	80

The table shows that the majority of students either *agree* or *strongly agree* that both verbal and non-verbal communication play an important role in classroom interaction. Gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, and tone of voice are perceived as supportive elements that enhance understanding, engagement, and motivation in the classroom.

Table 2:

Question	English Classroom (n=40) Mean	Median	SD	Urdu Classroom (n=40) Mean	Median	SD
Q1	3.95	4.0	1.05	3.83	4.0	1.16
Q2	3.92	4.0	1.03	3.83	4.0	1.12
Q3	3.96	4.0	1.04	3.86	4.0	1.10
Q4	3.98	4.0	1.08	3.88	4.0	1.17
Q5	3.91	4.0	1.05	3.81	4.0	1.13
Q6	3.87	4.0	1.04	3.79	4.0	1.13
Q7	3.92	4.0	1.08	3.84	4.0	1.20
Q8	3.93	4.0	1.07	3.83	4.0	1.17
Q9	3.95	4.0	1.06	3.85	4.0	1.16
Q10	4.03	4.0	1.08	3.93	4.0	1.14

This table 2 shows that students in both English and Urdu classrooms perceive verbal and non-verbal communication positively. Mean scores in the English classroom are slightly higher than in the Urdu classroom, particularly for items related to verbal clarity and gestures, which may reflect the structured teaching style of English-medium classes. Standard deviations indicate moderate variation, while median values of 4.0 show that most students agree or strongly agree with the statements. The high Cronbach's Alpha confirms that the questionnaire reliably captures students' perceptions across both classroom types.

The internal consistency of the 10-item questionnaire was checked using Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.87, indicating high reliability of the instrument. This shows that the items consistently measure students' perceptions of verbal and non-verbal classroom communication.

Table 3:

Theme	Example Student Responses	Analysis / Interpretation
Verbal Clarity	"The teacher explains the concepts very clearly, and I understand the steps easily." (English student 1) "Sometimes the instructions are long, and I get confused." (Urdu student 2)	English-medium students generally perceive verbal communication as structured and clear, while Urdu-medium students find it more contextual but occasionally less structured.
Use of Gestures	"When the teacher uses hand gestures, it's easier to follow the lesson." (English student 3) "Teachers use gestures a lot, but sometimes I don't know what they mean." (Urdu student 5)	Gestures help in understanding, but English classrooms use purposeful gestures, whereas Urdu classrooms use expressive but less standardized gestures.
Facial Expressions	"I can tell when the teacher is emphasizing an important point by their facial expressions." (English student 4) "Facial expressions are very expressive and help me know if I am doing well." (Urdu student 6)	Both classrooms rely on facial expressions, but Urdu classrooms are more expressive and relational, supporting engagement.
Eye Contact	"Teacher makes eye contact with everyone, which keeps me focused." (English student 2) "Eye contact is used, but sometimes the teacher looks at notes more." (Urdu student 9)	Eye contact is important in both, but English classrooms emphasize it for attention control, while Urdu classrooms use it more selectively.
Tone of Voice	"When the teacher changes tone, it signals important information." (English student 5) "Voice tone is friendly and encourages us to ask questions." (Urdu student 10)	Tone of voice supports comprehension and engagement. English classrooms use it to emphasize clarity, Urdu classrooms to build rapport.
Student Engagement	"I participate more when teachers ask questions and explain clearly." (English student 6) "I feel more confident when teachers smile and nod while I answer." (Urdu student 8)	Non-verbal cues increase participation. English classrooms encourage engagement via verbal prompts; Urdu classrooms use relational non-verbal cues.
Differences Across Languages	"English classes feel formal but easy to follow; Urdu classes feel lively and expressive." (English student 7) "I like Urdu classes because the teacher's	English-medium classrooms are structured and formal, focusing on verbal clarity. Urdu-medium classrooms are expressive and relational, focusing on engagement

	gestures and voice make it fun.” (Urdu student 3)	through non-verbal communication.
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The qualitative data collected from interviews with 20 students (10 from English-medium and 10 from Urdu-medium classrooms) reveal important insights into classroom communication. In English-medium classrooms, students reported that teachers’ verbal communication is generally structured and clear, with explanations delivered in an organized manner that makes it easier to understand concepts. Non-verbal cues, such as purposeful gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, and tone of voice, were noted to enhance comprehension and maintain students’ attention. Students emphasized that these cues helped them follow lessons effectively and encouraged participation during classroom interactions.

In Urdu-medium classrooms, students highlighted that teachers’ verbal communication is contextual and expressive, though sometimes less structured. Non-verbal communication, including gestures, expressive facial expressions, and supportive tone of voice, plays a critical role in engaging students and building rapport. Students reported that these cues created a comfortable learning environment, encouraged confidence, and fostered active participation. While English-medium classrooms rely more on structured verbal clarity supported by non-verbal signals, Urdu-medium classrooms emphasize relational and expressive communication, where non-verbal cues often carry as much meaning as spoken words.

Overall, the interviews indicate that both verbal and non-verbal communication are essential for effective classroom interaction. English-medium classrooms tend to focus on clarity and formal structure, while Urdu-medium classrooms rely on expressiveness and engagement through non-verbal cues. These findings complement the quantitative data, confirming that students perceive both types of communication as important, but the style and function of non-verbal cues differ according to the language of instruction and cultural context.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the crucial role of both verbal and non-verbal communication in English and Urdu classroom interactions at the university level. Regarding the first research question, which focuses on verbal communication strategies, the study found that English-medium classrooms primarily rely on structured and clear explanations, organized lectures, and systematic questioning. Quantitative data from the Likert-scale questionnaire showed high mean scores for items related to clarity of teacher talk, organization of instructions, and effectiveness of question-and-answer sessions, indicating that students perceive verbal communication in English-medium classrooms as highly effective. Qualitative interviews further confirmed that students value clear instructions and step-by-step explanations, which help them understand concepts and engage in classroom discussions. In contrast, Urdu-medium classrooms employ verbal communication that is more contextual, expressive, and relational, often relying on conversational language and peer interactions to enhance understanding. Students noted that while instructions may sometimes be less structured, the contextual explanations and frequent verbal reinforcement help them grasp concepts effectively.

The second research question addressed non-verbal communication features. Both classroom types demonstrated the importance of gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and tone of voice. In English classrooms, non-verbal cues were generally purposeful and structured, supporting verbal explanations and guiding student attention. Students reported that gestures and eye contact were especially helpful for following complex lessons, while tone of voice emphasized important points. In Urdu classrooms, non-verbal communication was more expressive and relational, with teachers using facial expressions, supportive gestures, and friendly tone to encourage participation and build rapport with students. Quantitative results reflected these observations, with questionnaire items related to teacher gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice receiving relatively high mean scores in both classrooms, although

slightly higher in English classrooms for clarity-focused behaviors and higher in Urdu classrooms for relational cues.

The third research question explored the differences in verbal and non-verbal communication between English and Urdu classrooms. The study revealed that English classrooms tend to be formal, structured, and clarity-focused, while Urdu classrooms are expressive, interactive, and engagement-focused. Non-verbal communication differs accordingly: English-medium teachers use gestures, eye contact, and tone to reinforce verbal clarity, whereas Urdu-medium teachers employ similar non-verbal cues to create a comfortable learning environment and maintain engagement. This distinction aligns with cultural and linguistic norms, where English classrooms follow more Western teaching conventions emphasizing structured discourse, and Urdu classrooms reflect South Asian educational practices emphasizing relational and contextual communication. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data supports these conclusions, demonstrating that while both verbal and non-verbal communication are essential in all classrooms, the style, function, and emphasis of communication vary according to the language of instruction and cultural context.

Overall, the study confirms that effective classroom interaction relies on a balance of verbal and non-verbal communication, with each type complementing the other. English classrooms emphasize clarity and structure, and students respond to organized verbal strategies supported by deliberate non-verbal cues. Urdu classrooms focus on expressiveness and relational interaction, where non-verbal cues often carry as much weight as verbal explanations in engaging students and facilitating learning. These findings have important implications for teachers and curriculum designers, suggesting that understanding the interplay between language, culture, and communication strategies can enhance classroom effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

Answering Research Questions

1. **Verbal communication strategies:** English classrooms use structured explanations, organized lectures, and systematic questioning. Urdu classrooms use contextual, expressive, and relational verbal communication, with more conversational reinforcement.
2. **Non-verbal communication features:** Common features in both classrooms include gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and tone of voice. English classrooms use them purposefully to reinforce clarity; Urdu classrooms use them to encourage engagement and build rapport.
3. **Differences in communication:** English-medium classrooms are formal, structured, and clarity-focused, while Urdu-medium classrooms are expressive, interactive, and engagement-focused. The function and style of non-verbal cues differ accordingly.

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