

Teacher Immediacy Practices of Secondary School Teachers: A Students' Perspective

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Abstract

The major aim of the study was to explore the teacher immediacy among secondary school teachers. The study was descriptive in nature and followed quantitative and survey type research design for the exploration of teacher immediacy. The population of the study comprised all male and female students of Federal Government Secondary schools of Islamabad Capital Territory. The stratified random sampling technique was used to draw the sample of the study: total 56 (40% of total) Government secondary schools of boys and girls and 1680 students were included in the sample. Teacher Immediacy Scale comprising twenty-six items was developed by the researcher for collection of the data. A pilot study was conducted to find out the reliability of the items of the research instruments which displayed that Cronbach's Alpha value was .87 which means that the reliability value of the instrument was high. The findings of the study highlighted that majority of the teachers were rated high in exercising immediacy behaviours with students. It was revealed that male teachers exercised immediacy behaviours more than female teachers. The comparison of practicing the immediacy behaviours of urban and rural teachers displayed that there was no significant difference between their mean scores. It is proposed that teachers should practice immediacy behaviours in classroom while teaching and dealing students. This will enable them to improve their teaching and gain academic excellence by engaging students in classroom.

Keywords: *Teacher Immediacy, Teachers, Students, Male, Female, Urban, Rural.*

Introduction

The immediate behaviours exercised by teachers are expected to be quite important in boosting students' involvement in classroom and consequently lead to enhance learning process in classroom (Rocca, 2008). It has been proposed by earlier researchers that immediate behaviours of teachers are quite helpful in creating conducive learning environment and students find themselves contended to participate in classroom activities (Mehrabian, 2007). In a study conducted by Roberts & Friedman, (2013) to find out relationship between teacher immediacy and student participation over different subjects, it was highlighted that results of the study were very valuable for different education settings. It has been proposed that when teachers ask students to share their views and extend love, maintain eye contact with students, use humour, share their personal examples and show comfortable body posture can be very effective to enhance students' participation in classroom. It was revealed by the results of the study that teachers who use more immediacy behaviours in their classrooms put greater impact in improving students' participation in the

classroom. The results of the study also indicated that when teachers show warmth for their students the students' participation is enhanced (Roberts & Friedman, 2013). Immediate teachers also make their students much motivated to learn (Tevin & Hanson, 2004). This perception among students can be created by employing non- verbal and verbal immediacy behaviours. Teacher immediacy can be described as a compound set of nonverbal and verbal behaviours which create conceptions of psychological closeness with students (Andersen & Andersen, 1982). Mehrabian (1971) used the term immediacy for the first time and narrated it as the communicative behaviour of the teacher that boosts nearness and interaction with the learners. According to the concept of immediacy, people are more interested in persons and things that are evaluated highly by them and give them much importance whereas they try to keep themselves away and circumvent the things which they dislike, don't prefer or evaluate them negatively.

When an immediate teacher uses emotional cuing like sharing personal examples, heartfelt vocal prompts, maintaining eye contact with students, coming close to students and passing smiles on students results in the enrichment and stimulation of the emotional engagement of the students and they give more attention to subject matter (Mazer, 2012). Students who are effectively engaged exhibit certain behaviours not only in the classroom settings but also outside the classroom, display their interest and engagement in learning (Mazer, 2012). Such students not only pay full attention to listening but also contribute in classroom discussions, ask questions from teachers and prepare their notes.

An immediate teacher reflects positive attitude (Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985), that results in enhancing liking, association and positive influence towards students (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Immediacy behaviours highlight greater interpersonal sensory stimulation and minimize the distance between people (Andersen, 1979). In simple words the teachers who display more immediate behaviours are more liked by students than the teachers who don't exercise immediate behaviours (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). It is also described that exercise of immediacy behaviours by teachers can be much effective instructional strategies to enhance achievement of learners in different academic areas (Rocca, 2010). Immediacy behaviours not only enhance the performance of students of different academic disciplines but also the students of different cultural backgrounds (Ozmen, 2011). It has been observed that conclusive learning outcomes only take place when learners are dynamically engaged in academic activities (Davis, 2009).

Objectives of the Study

Following were the objectives of the study:

1. To explore teacher immediacy among secondary school teachers.
2. To compare the difference in teacher *immediacy by gender and locale*.

Research Questions

Research questions of the study were:

1. To what extent teachers are demonstrating immediacy in the classrooms?
2. How does teacher *immediacy differ by gender*?
3. What is the effect of geographical differences (rural & urban) on teacher immediacy?

Literature Review

Teacher Immediacy

The term immediacy had been initiated by Mehrabian (1969, 1981) and is related to communication behaviours and was named as implicit communication theory. According to this theory people persistently

communicate by using non- verbal and verbal communication behaviours. The focus of teacher immediacy is on perception of the students about teacher and environment of the classroom without considering what in real sense is going on in the classroom. Teachers who employ immediate behaviours create the conception in their students that our teachers care us (Tevin & Hanson, 2004). Immediate teachers get their students understand that they are in the classroom which is psychologically safe and promotes learning (Gentilucci, 2004). Teachers who employ immediate behaviours in the classroom enable their students to realize that there is quite less psychological and physical gap between themselves and their teacher (Allen, Witt, & Wheelless, 2006). Immediate teachers also make their students much motivated to learn (Tevin & Hanson, 2004). This perception among students can be created by employing non- verbal and verbal immediacy behaviours. Teacher immediacy can be described as a compound set of nonverbal and verbal behaviours which create conceptions of psychological closeness with students (Andersen & Andersen, 1982).

A teacher who is considered as most immediate practices to maintain persistent eye contact with the students, uses variety while being vocal, moves away in the class, gives different gestures, uses humour and shares personal events and examples with the students during the class. On the other hand, a non-immediate teacher simply reads from the notes, stands behind the rostrum, uses monotone delivery, gives few gestures, uses less humour and gives abstract examples (Andersen, 1986). A teacher who is considered as more immediate is also considered as more responsive by the students and endeavors to effect and transform classroom behaviour. Students fulfil the desires of those teachers who are highly immediate because the awareness regarding immediacy produces maximum referent, honor and liking (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000).

Verbal Immediacy

Many behaviours of the immediate teachers have been highlighted by different researches. Vocal expressiveness is one of these behaviours (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001); sharing personal examples in the class with students (Frenzel, Goetz, Ludtke, Pekrun, & Sutton, 2009); and the exercise of motivation, admiration and humour (Gentilucci, 2004). How a teacher does mention his class? Also comes in the domain of verbal immediacy. When a teacher transforms pronoun case from past to present, "I" to "we," and "should" to "want," is also considered the domain of verbal immediacy (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004).

Interaction and conceptions of being close with individuals are influenced by immediacy (Mehrabian, 1969b) and this is practiced with the help of verbal (explicit) and non- verbal (implicit) channels. In the early phase of the emergence of the immediacy concept based on Mehrabian's (1969a, 1969b), scholars agreed to consider immediacy as a non- verbal component. Mehrabian (1981) stated that the interactions between teacher and students are like interpersonal relations and involve both verbal and non- verbal communication. Later the influence of verbal immediacy had been observed on the behaviours of the students and learning by Gorham (1988).

Use of humour, praising students, participating in classroom and out of the classroom discussions, self-discourse of the teacher, asking open ended questions in the classroom to get the opinion and views of the students, getting follow up on the topics initiated by students, giving feedback to students about their work and asking students to ask questions even after the class are considered as verbal immediacy elements (Gorham, 1988).

Nonverbal Immediacy

Several researches have highlighted that non- verbal immediacy is more influential as compared to verbal immediacy (Christophel, 1990), and students perceive those students more caring credible who practice more non- verbal immediacy behaviours (Tevin & Hanson, 2004). Teachers who maintain eye contact with students, use nods while talking, and give smiles to students are exercising non- verbal behaviours (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001). During teaching in the classroom, teacher who persistently moves around

the classroom are also considered as exercising non- verbal immediacy behaviours (Frenzel et al., 2009). Teachers who exhibit relaxed body posture (Christophel, 1990), maintain closeness with pupils (Frymier, 1994) use different facial expressions (Frenzel et al., 2009) are also the examples of non- verbal immediacy. Improvement of the liking of students for the learning content, teacher, class and enhancing his desire to learn more is the basic role of teacher's non- verbal behaviour (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). According to (Allen, Witt & Wheelless, 2006) immediacy improves affective learning and consequently enhance cognitive learning of students. Immediacy is a great way to enhance the motivation level of students to give attention to studies and attend the class regularly. Nonverbal immediacy behaviours enhance or generate mutual closeness, stimulate sensory reflexes, indicate excitement and cordiality (Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985). Nonverbal immediacy behaviours involve maintaining eye contact, passing smiles, using nods, having relaxed body posture, leaning towards someone, moving around while talking and giving different positive gestures and are important in minimizing psychological and physical gap between students and teacher and enhances affective learning (Christophel & Gorham, 1995).

Importance of Teacher Immediacy

Research has proved immense benefits of immediacy used by teachers. This result in enhancing motivational level students towards learning, developing ability of students to learn by involving cognitive and affective domains and developing associations with the outlooks of significance and proficiency towards the subject matter (Burroughs, 2007; Houser & Frymier, 2009). The appropriate use of immediacy cues may be handy when these are used in classroom settings (Mehrabian, 1972). Teacher immediacy is a composite set of behaviours that are used by teachers and are deeply rooted in communications. These are linked with teacher- student relationships. Immediacy behaviours are also quite similar to engagement because both involve behavioural, emotional and cognitive features between student and teachers. The immediacy behaviours stimulate cognitive and behavioural reactions to social connections and are meant to minimize psychological distance (Mehrabian, 1972).

Immediacy in the Classroom

When a positive mutual relationship is created between students and teacher, it results in the creation of encouraging attitudes towards the learning environment (Richmond, Gorham & McCroskey, 1987) and the institution (Sweet, 1986; Tinto, 1975). The enhancement in using the immediate behaviour of the teachers, maximizes teacher- student communication and interaction. In case students are highly engaged in communicating with their teachers, they are more likely to get their desired information (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Academic integration is largely described in terms of academic achievement but also involves engagement of students in the scholarly activities and services provided by the school (Tinto, 1975). The frequency and quality of teacher- student contacts and associations are indispensable for the creation of social integration (Sweet, 1986).

According to (Allen, Witt & Wheelless, 2006) immediacy improves affective learning and consequently enhance cognitive learning of students. Immediacy is a great way to enhance the motivation level of students to give attention to studies and attend the class regularly. Nonverbal immediacy behaviours enhance or generate mutual closeness, stimulate sensory reflexes, indicate excitement and cordiality (Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985). Nonverbal immediacy behaviours involve maintaining eye contact, passing smiles, using nods, having relaxed body posture, leaning towards someone, moving around while talking and giving different positive gestures and are important in minimizing psychological and physical gaps between students and teacher and enhance affective learning (Christophel & Gorham, 1995).

The status between the students and teacher is also reduced due to influence of the immediate behaviour of the teacher. It doesn't mean that the level of the teacher and students become equal in the classroom. It just means that the student will not be frightened by the high status of the teacher. This will enable the students to be more willing in asking questions from teacher to clarify his problems about the subject matter without being frightened by the teacher (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Teachers who display immediate

behaviours stimulate their students to ask questions about all the areas of the content and to ask teachers and fellow students to explain the causes or to simplify the ideas and to display respect for others during mutual discussions (Book & Putnam, 1992).

Methodology

Research Design

The present study was quantitative and descriptive in nature. Survey method was used to collect the responses of the participants. The population of the study comprised all male and female students of secondary level of Islamabad Model Schools for boys and girls of Islamabad. Researcher administered the research instrument to 1680 students and 1651 students responded to the research instrument from the selected 56 schools of Islamabad.

Research Instrument

For measuring the teacher immediacy, Teacher Immediacy Scale containing 26 items (14 for verbal immediacy and 12 for non- verbal immediacy) was developed by the researcher. On a 5-point Likert scale (Always = 4, Often = 3, Sometimes = 2, Rarely = 1 and Never = 0) teachers were observed to rank their behaviours associated with immediacy. The Immediacy scale was administered to all the students included in the sample of the study.

Reliability of the Research Instrument

The Internal consistency coefficient (using Cronbach Alpha) was computed through SPSS V.16. for reliability check of the instrument. The reliability test of the research instrument displayed .87 value of the Cronbach's Alpha which reflects the higher reliability of the instrument.

Results

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were quantitatively analyzed. The responses of the participants were analyzed by applying descriptive statistics and t- test.

Table 1: Mean, maximum, minimum, Range and SD of Teacher Immediacy (N=1651)

Teacher Immediacy	M	Max	Min	Range	SD
Teacher Immediacy Overall	77.63	104	14	90	1.324

Table 1 presents the mean score of teacher immediacy. The mean score value of teachers on teacher immediacy was 77.63, with standard deviation of 1.324. The maximum score of teacher immediacy scale had been 104 and minimum score was 14. There is no much difference between mean score (77.63) of teachers on teacher immediacy and the highest score (104), therefore, most of the teachers are rated high on teacher immediacy scale.

Table 2: Comparison of Male and Female Teachers' Immediacy Behaviours scores as reported by students (N=1651) from 56 Schools

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	T	p
Teacher Immediacy	Male	763	3.15	.75	1649	.378	.00
	Female	888	3.14	.81			

p<0.05

Table 2 portrays the comparison of teachers' immediacy behaviours on teachers' gender (Male/Female) basis by using independent sample t-test and shows that a significant difference exists between the mean scores of immediacy behaviours of male and female teachers, as $p = .00$ ($p < 0.05$), for male teachers ($M=3.15$, $SD = .751$) and for female teachers ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .81$); $t(1649) = .378$. It is clear that mean score of male teachers is higher than that of female teachers.

Table 3: Comparison of Teachers' Immediacy Behaviours scores on School locale (Urban / Rural) Basis as reported by students (N=1651) from 56 Schools

Variable	Area	N	Mean	SD	df	T	p
Teacher Immediacy	Urban	526	3.03	.85	1649	-4.1	.37
	Rural	1125	3.20	.74			

* $p > 0.05$

Table 3 shows the comparison of teachers' immediacy behaviours on teachers' locale (Urban / Rural) basis by applying independent sample t-test and reflects that no significant difference is present between the mean scores of teachers' immediacy behaviours of urban and rural teachers, as $p = .37$ ($p < 0.05$), for Urban teachers ($M=3.03$, $SD = .85$) and for rural teachers ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .74$); $t(1649) = -4.1$.

Discussion

It is indicated by the study that both dimensions (verbal immediacy and non-verbal immediacy) of teacher immediacy are often practiced by teachers. These results are in conformity to the results found by Estep & Roberts (2015). They stated that participants supposed that their teachers practiced verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviours often. These are also similar to the results indicated by Estep (2012), Littlejohn (2012) and Estep & Roberts (2013) which narrate that teachers exhibit immediacy behaviours quite often in the classroom. The results of the study are not in line with the study conducted by Marx, Simonsen & Kitchel (2016) which indicated that teachers moderately used verbal and non-verbal immediacy behaviours in the classrooms. The results of the present research highlighted that teachers' gender does affect their immediacy behaviours. There was a significant difference between the mean scores of immediacy behaviours of male and female teachers. It was concluded that male teachers exercised immediacy behaviours more than female teachers. These results are in consistent with the results of Wolfe & Waters (2013) who found that male educators were supposed to exercise more verbal immediacy than female teachers. The results of the research are different than the results of (Gorham, 1988) who stated that after the study of verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviours that are practiced by teachers showed that female teachers are observed as more immediate than the male teachers. The results of the study support the results of (MacNell, Driscoll & Hunt, 2015) who stated that both teachers (male/ female) displayed same level of interpersonal interaction in their efforts to produce a sense of immediacy in the online classroom but male teachers were rated high than female teachers. The results of the study are quite similar to the results of Al Ghamdi (2017) who discovered that male lecturers displayed immediacy behaviours less than female lecturers. The comparison of practicing the immediacy behaviours of urban and rural teachers, it was revealed that no significant difference was found between their mean scores. Keeping in mind the urban and rural areas of Islamabad Capital Territory it is settled that there is not so much difference in exercising the communication behaviours while teaching in the classroom. The reason behind may be that all teachers whether working in rural areas or urban areas of Islamabad are commissioned/ recruited and trained by following a prescribed selection criterion that is same for all the teachers. Furthermore, the FDE Headquarter transfers teachers from rural to urban area and urban to rural area as per the needs of the institution. Therefore, the geographical area does not matter in case of teachers serving in Islamabad Capital Territory. This doesn't support the results of Arif, Hubeis, Ginting, Purnaningsih & Saleh (2014) who discovered that communication behaviours of the urban and rural teachers are different from each other.

Conclusions

It was concluded on the basis of the findings of the study that both dimensions (verbal immediacy and non-verbal immediacy) of teacher immediacy are often practiced in the classroom by teachers. It was evident that teachers' gender does affect their immediacy behaviours. There was a significant difference between the mean scores of immediacy behaviours of male and female teachers. It was concluded that male teachers exercised immediacy behaviours more than female teachers. The comparison of practicing the immediacy behaviours of urban and rural teachers, it was concluded that there was no significant difference between their mean scores.

Recommendations

There are wide- range benefits of using immediacy behaviours while interacting with students. It is proposed that teachers should practice immediacy behaviours in classroom while teaching and dealing students. This will enable them to improve their teaching and gain academic excellence by engaging students in classroom. It is also recommended that heads should guide and motivate female teachers to use immediacy behaviours because immediacy behaviours improve attention of students, enhances power of memorization, increases motivation & enthusiasm and students' affective and cognitive learning. The results of the study concerning the exercise of immediacy behaviours in classroom are originated from the responses of students only. For future studies the viewpoints of teachers and school leaders regarding teacher immediacy are also proposed. The researcher used quantitative and survey method of study due to resource and time constraints. More longitudinal studies need to be conducted on teachers to find out their immediacy behaviours. Qualitative method of research including interviews, focus group discussions and observations could be conducted to find out immediacy behaviours in depth.

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