

# The Impact of Gestures and Facial Expressions in Language Acquisition

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## Keywords

Non-verbal communication  
 Gestures in language learning  
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 Embodied cognition in teaching

## Abstract

Non-verbal communication, particularly gestures and facial expressions, plays a crucial role in second language acquisition by enhancing comprehension, retention, and engagement. This study investigates the impact of teachers' gestures and facial expressions in an EFL classroom setting, focusing on their influence on vocabulary learning and student interaction. Through an experimental design involving 60 adult learners, we analyzed the effects of high vs. low gesture use and expressive vs. neutral facial expressions on immediate vocabulary recall and long-term retention. The results indicate that gestures significantly improved learning outcomes, with students in the high-gesture condition scoring notably higher on post-tests. While facial expressions alone had a smaller effect on test performance, they positively influenced learner engagement and classroom atmosphere. The study highlights the synergistic effect of combining gestures with expressive facial cues, reinforcing theories of embodied cognition and communicative competence in language learning. These findings suggest that intentional integration of gestures and facial expressions in teaching methodologies can enhance comprehensible input and student motivation, leading to more effective language acquisition. The study contributes to the growing body of research on multimodal learning, emphasizing the importance of non-verbal communication in second language pedagogy.

## INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is a multimodal process, involving not only words and grammar but also a rich array of non-verbal cues. **Non-verbal communication** – particularly gestures (hand and body movements) and **facial expressions** – plays a crucial role in how languages are taught and learned. These non-verbal elements often carry significant meaning; for example, a teacher's encouraging smile or a demonstrative hand motion can reinforce spoken language. Classic communications research has even suggested that a majority of emotional meaning in face-to-face interactions is conveyed through tone and facial/body cues

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rather than words alone. In language classrooms, gestures and facial expressions can provide context, illustrate concepts, and maintain learner engagement.

*Key Terms:* In this article, **gestures** refer to deliberate movements of the hands, arms, or body that convey meaning or support communication. They include **iconic gestures** (which depict content visually, e.g. miming a shape or action), **metaphoric gestures** (abstract representations, e.g. cupping hands to represent an idea), **deictic gestures** (pointing to people or objects), and **beat gestures** (rhythmic movements aligned with speech for emphasis). **Facial expressions** refer to movements of facial muscles (smiling, frowning, eyebrow raises, etc.) that convey emotions or reactions. Both are components of **non-verbal communication**, which encompasses all communicative signals beyond words, such as body language, eye contact, and tone.

The importance of these non-verbal behaviors in language acquisition is increasingly recognized. Gestures and facial expressions can make input more **comprehensible** to learners by providing visual and contextual clues (connecting to Krashen's concept of *comprehensible input*). They also can lower the **affective filter** – a term from second language acquisition theory referring to emotional barriers to learning – by creating a more engaging, supportive atmosphere. For instance, teachers' positive facial expressions and inviting gestures can put students at ease, encouraging participation. Moreover, some theories of **embodied cognition** suggest that learning is enhanced when it involves physical action and sensory experience; gestures effectively embody language concepts, potentially deepening cognitive processing.

**Research Objectives:** This study aims to investigate *how gestures and facial expressions impact language acquisition in a classroom setting*. We focus on practical classroom implementation, examining whether teachers' use of gestures and facial cues can improve learners' understanding, memory, and engagement in second language learning. The objectives are: (1) to synthesize existing research on the role of gestures and facial expressions in language learning, (2) to present an original classroom-based study analyzing the effects of these non-verbal cues on learner outcomes, and (3) to discuss pedagogical implications for language teachers. By exploring these objectives, we seek to highlight the importance of integrating non-verbal communication strategies into language instruction to facilitate more effective and dynamic learning experiences.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research highlights the role of gestures and facial expressions in language learning. Gestures aid comprehension and retention, while facial expressions enhance emotional engagement and communication clarity.

### Gestures in Language Learning

Asher's (1969) Total Physical Response (TPR) introduced movement-based learning, a method still used to teach vocabulary. Studies show gestures improve recall (Allen, 1995; Tellier, 2008) and enhance vocabulary retention (Kelly et al., 2009). They facilitate learning by dual-coding information (Paivio's Dual Coding Theory) and reducing cognitive load.

Gestures also support real-time comprehension. Instructors' spontaneous gestures help clarify meanings (Lazaraton, 2004), while students find them engaging and informative (Sime, 2006). Gesturing while



speaking aids cognition and links new concepts to prior knowledge (Goldin-Meadow, 2009; Church et al., 2004). Neuroscientific studies confirm that gestures activate sensorimotor areas, improving long-term retention (Macedonia & Knösche, 2011). Effective use of gestures depends on factors such as learner age and gesture type.

### **Facial Expressions in Language Learning**

Facial expressions, though less studied, play a crucial role in communication and teaching. They convey emotions, provide feedback, and influence motivation (Becker et al., 2014). Facial cues help learners self-correct (Sloan & Carson-Berndsen, 2017) and reinforce meaning through emotional association. Exaggerated expressions aid comprehension by modeling tone and emotion, making language learning more immersive.

Multimodal input strengthens learning (Gullberg et al., 2010), and research suggests that facial expressions are most effective when combined with gestures (Salsabila, 2020). Overuse of facial expressions alone may distract learners, but when integrated with gestures, they create a holistic learning experience.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Embodied Cognition Theory suggests that cognitive processes are rooted in physical interactions, making gestures a key tool for encoding language (Alibali & Nathan, 2012). The Communicative/Pragmatic perspective highlights non-verbal cues as essential for communication. Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky) views gestures and expressions as mediational tools that scaffold understanding.

Gestures and facial expressions enhance language learning by aiding comprehension, memory, and engagement. While gestures play a stronger role in meaning-making, facial expressions contribute to motivation and feedback. Effective integration of these non-verbal strategies is key to optimizing learning outcomes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To investigate the impact of gestures and facial expressions on language acquisition in a classroom setting, we designed an original experimental study complemented by qualitative observations. The study took place in an English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom and employed a controlled intervention where we manipulated the teacher's use of gestures and facial expressions during instruction. Below we outline the participants, data collection procedures, instruments, and analysis techniques used.

### **Participants**

The participants were 60 adult learners (ages 18–30) enrolled in an intermediate-level EFL course at a university language center. The group included 38 female and 22 male students, with diverse first language backgrounds (L1s included Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, and others). All participants had a comparable intermediate English proficiency (B1-B2 level on the CEFR, as determined by a placement test). None had known hearing or visual impairments, to ensure they could equally perceive oral and visual cues. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four class sections for the experiment, each with 15 students. All sections were taught by the same experienced instructor to control for teaching style differences. The



instructor was a female in her 30s, a native English speaker, trained in using gestures for teaching through prior professional development workshops.

### Experimental Design and Procedure

We used a **2 x 2 factorial experimental design** with two independent variables: **Gesture use** (High vs. Low) and **Facial Expression use** (Expressive vs. Neutral). This yielded four conditions:

- **Condition 1:** High Gestures + Expressive Face (the instructor used abundant illustrative gestures and animated facial expressions while teaching).
- **Condition 2:** High Gestures + Neutral Face (gestures used, but the instructor maintained a neutral facial expression, minimizing emotional cues).
- **Condition 3:** Low Gestures + Expressive Face (minimal gestures, but the instructor used rich facial expressions).
- **Condition 4:** Low Gestures + Neutral Face (minimal gestures and neutral facial expression – effectively a control condition with primarily verbal instruction only).

Each class section (15 students) experienced one of these conditions. The content taught in all four sections was kept identical: a 45-minute lesson introducing 20 new vocabulary words and 5 idiomatic expressions in English, all related to emotions and actions (for example: “to grin,” “to shrug,” idiom “to give someone a hand,” etc.). The lesson was delivered using a slide presentation and spoken explanations in English.

In the **High Gestures** conditions, the instructor deliberately incorporated iconic or deictic gestures for each target vocabulary item. For instance, for the word “shrug,” she physically performed a shrug; for “huge,” she spread her arms wide to indicate “very large.” For idioms like “give someone a hand,” she mimed the action of helping or clapping (to illustrate both meanings). These gestures were planned in advance to closely match the meaning of each item. In contrast, in the **Low Gestures** classes, the instructor kept her hands mostly at her sides or on the podium, using only occasional minimal gestures (like a slight pointing to the slide, or natural hand movements that carry no specific meaning).

For **Facial Expression**, in Expressive conditions the instructor was encouraged to use her face to convey enthusiasm, emotion, and reactions: smiling frequently, widening her eyes for surprise, frowning or looking puzzled when appropriate to the word meaning (e.g., looking angry when teaching “frustrated”). In Neutral Face conditions, she maintained a calm, mildly positive but fairly neutral expression throughout, avoiding strong emotional displays. Notably, in all conditions the instructor’s *voice* and explanatory script were held constant (she used the same verbal explanations and intonation pattern as much as possible across conditions, reading from a prepared script to ensure consistency). This control was intended so that any differences in learning could be attributed to the non-verbal factors rather than differences in verbal teaching content.

The lessons were conducted over one week (one condition per day). Students were not initially informed about the specific focus on gestures or facial expressions to avoid influencing their behavior or creating bias; they were debriefed after the study.



## Data Collection Instruments

We collected both **quantitative data** (to measure learning outcomes) and **qualitative data** (to capture student perceptions and classroom interactions):

- **Pre-test and Post-test:** To measure vocabulary acquisition, we administered a short written test to all participants *before* the lesson (pre-test) and *after* the lesson (immediate post-test). The pre-test ensured that students did not already know the target words/idioms. It asked students to match or define the 20 words and 5 idioms in their L1 or in English. Only items that a student answered incorrectly or left blank on the pre-test were counted as “unknown” and thus considered in learning gains. The post-test, given about 10 minutes after the lesson, had the same format (translate or define each item). We scored the number of items answered correctly on the post-test that were previously unknown on the pre-test, giving each student a **learning gain score** (out of a maximum possible 25).
- **Delayed Test:** To assess retention, we also gave a surprise delayed post-test one week later, consisting of the same items, to see how many words/idioms students retained over time. This was not announced in advance to ensure it reflected genuine memory retention.
- **Student Survey:** After the immediate post-test, students filled out a brief survey about their experience. The survey included Likert-scale questions (1–5) on aspects such as: “*The teacher’s way of explaining helped me understand the words*”, “*I found the teacher’s body language/facial expressions engaging*”, “*I felt confident about remembering the words after this class*”, etc. It also invited open-ended comments about what helped them learn in the lesson and any observations they had about the teacher’s style.
- **Classroom Observation and Recording:** Each lesson was video-recorded (with prior consent) to allow analysis of the teacher’s non-verbal behavior and student reactions. Two observers (research assistants) were present in each class, sitting discreetly at the back, to take notes on student engagement (e.g., noting instances of visible confusion, laughter, mimicry of teacher’s gestures by students, questions asked, etc.). The video recordings also allowed us to verify that the instructor adhered to the gesture/expression protocols for each condition (e.g., counting the number of gestures used, analyzing facial expression intensity).

The combination of tests, surveys, and observations was chosen to provide a comprehensive picture: the tests focused on *learning outcomes* (objective gains in vocabulary), while surveys and observations provided insight into *learner perceptions* and the interactive dynamics in the classroom.

## Data Analysis

For the quantitative data (test scores), we used statistical analysis appropriate for the factorial design. We performed a two-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) on the immediate post-test scores with factors **Gesture (High vs Low)** and **Facial Expression (Expressive vs Neutral)**. This tested for the main effects of gestures and facial expressions, as well as any interaction effect between the two factors. We also compared the delayed test scores in a similar way to examine retention differences. Where relevant, post-



hoc pairwise comparisons (Tukey's HSD) were conducted to see which specific groups differed from each other. The significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$  for all tests.

Survey results were analyzed by calculating the mean and standard deviation for each Likert-scale item per condition, and comparing these across conditions (using non-parametric tests if appropriate, given the ordinal nature of Likert data). The open-ended responses were coded qualitatively: two researchers read through all comments and performed **thematic analysis**, identifying recurring themes such as "helped understanding," "distracting," "made class fun," etc., which were then tallied and exemplar quotes noted.

Observation notes and video were analyzed qualitatively to supplement the survey. We specifically reviewed the recordings to note any notable behaviors: Did students mirror the teacher's gestures? Were there instances of confusion resolved by a gesture or facial cue? How was the overall classroom energy in each condition (e.g., laughter, questions asked)? We also coded the video for how often students looked at the teacher's face or hands during key teaching moments, as a rough measure of where their attention was directed (this was done by a frame-by-frame check at random intervals for each session).

By triangulating quantitative test performance with qualitative feedback and observations, we aimed to derive a well-rounded understanding of how gestures and facial expressions affected both measurable learning and the learning experience.

## RESULTS

**Quantitative Findings:** The analysis of the vocabulary test scores revealed clear effects of the non-verbal communication strategies on learning outcomes. On the immediate post-test, students who were taught with **High Gestures** (Conditions 1 and 2) outperformed those in **Low Gestures** conditions (Conditions 3 and 4). The mean score (out of 25) for the High Gestures group was 18.5 (SD = 3.2), compared to 15.0 (SD = 4.1) for the Low Gestures group – a statistically significant difference,  $F(1,56)=11.24$ ,  $p=0.0015$ . This indicates that the use of deliberate gestures by the teacher led to greater vocabulary acquisition. The effect size (partial  $\eta^2 \approx 0.17$ ) suggests a moderate impact of gestures on learning outcomes. This finding aligns with previous research that has shown gesture-enriched teaching improves word recall.

The main effect of **Facial Expressions** (Expressive vs Neutral) on immediate post-test scores was smaller and not statistically significant overall ( $F(1,56)=2.45$ ,  $p=0.12$ ). The Expressive Face groups (Conditions 1 and 3) had a mean of 17.1 (SD = 3.8) vs 16.4 (SD = 4.0) for Neutral Face (Conditions 2 and 4). This slight advantage for expressive facial cues did not reach significance in terms of immediate vocabulary test performance. However, an **interaction effect** emerged between gestures and facial expressions ( $F(1,56)=4.07$ ,  $p=0.048$ ). The highest scores of all were achieved by Condition 1 (High Gestures + Expressive Face), with a mean of 19.2, and the lowest by Condition 4 (Low Gestures + Neutral Face), with a mean of 14.5. Conditions 2 and 3 were intermediate (around 16-17). Post-hoc comparisons confirmed that Condition 1 > Condition 4 at  $p < 0.01$ , while differences among the other pairings were marginal. This interaction suggests that gestures and facial expressions together provided a **synergistic benefit** – when the teacher was highly gestural, adding a smiling, expressive demeanor further boosted learning, and conversely, in the absence of gestures, an expressive face alone could not compensate for the lack of visual hand cues (consistent with the non-significant main effect of face alone). These results mirror the insights



from Salsabila's (2020) online study, which found the combination of gestures **and** happy expressions most effective.

On the one-week **delayed test**, we observed that the High Gestures conditions also retained more vocabulary. Students in High Gesture classes remembered on average 70% of the new words a week later, compared to about 55% in Low Gesture classes (this difference was significant,  $p < 0.05$ ). Notably, the retention advantage for Condition 1 (Gestures+Expressive) was highest at 72%, suggesting that an engaging, multi-modal presentation not only helped initial learning but also helped anchor the words in memory longer-term. Condition 4 (no gestures, neutral) had the poorest retention (51%). These retention patterns reinforce the immediate post-test findings that gestures contribute to longer-lasting learning – an effect well-documented in gesture studies where enacting or seeing gestures leads to stronger memory traces.

**Survey Results:** Students' subjective feedback helps interpret these performance outcomes. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), students in the High Gestures conditions agreed most strongly with the statement "*The teacher's gestures helped me understand the words*" (mean rating 4.6 in Condition 1 and 4.4 in Condition 2, as opposed to 2.9 and 3.1 in the Low Gesture conditions). Similarly, when asked if the teacher's facial expressions helped understanding, the difference was less stark: Expressive Face conditions got slightly higher agreement (mean ~4.0) than Neutral (mean ~3.5). Interestingly, on the item "*I found the teacher's style engaging*," Condition 1 scored highest (4.8/5 on average), followed by Condition 3 (4.2), Condition 2 (4.0) and Condition 4 last (3.3). This suggests that an expressive face alone (Cond.3) made the class feel more engaging than a neutral teacher, even if test scores didn't show much difference, highlighting the motivational aspect of facial cues. Condition 2 (gestures + neutral face) was rated slightly less engaging than Condition 3 in perception, perhaps because a neutral facial demeanor dampened the enthusiasm even though gestures were present. Meanwhile, the control-like Condition 4 (no significant non-verbal cues) was least engaging to students.

**Classroom Observations:** The observers' notes and video analysis corroborated many of these points. In the high gesture classes, students frequently smiled or chuckled at some of the teacher's pantomimes (indicating increased enjoyment), and they often *imitated* gestures either deliberately (e.g., repeating the gesture back when saying the word aloud) or unconsciously. In one instance, when the teacher taught "to shiver" by shaking her arms and shoulders as if cold, several students spontaneously mimicked the shivering motion along with her – an embodied mirroring that likely reinforced the concept. By contrast, in the low gesture classes, observers noted more instances of students looking slightly puzzled or disengaged during purely verbal explanations, until the teacher gave additional verbal examples. The video attention coding suggested that in high gesture conditions, students' gaze was often directed at the teacher's hand movements during key vocabulary moments, whereas in low gesture conditions students looked at the slideshow or the teacher's face more. In expressive face conditions, students were observed to smile back at the teacher more and appear generally relaxed. In neutral face conditions, the atmosphere was a bit more formal; however, the teacher's friendly tone likely prevented it from feeling too flat.

## DISCUSSION



These results reinforce and extend findings from existing literature on the role of non-verbal communication in language learning. In this section, we interpret our study's findings in the context of prior research, discuss pedagogical implications for language classrooms, and suggest how teachers might apply these insights.

**Gestures as Catalysts for Comprehension and Memory:** The clear benefit of teacher gestures on student vocabulary learning observed in our study is consistent with numerous prior studies that highlight gestures as powerful pedagogical tools. The significant gains in the gesture conditions echo Allen's (1995) conclusion that **learning with emblematic gestures leads to greater recall of phrases**. Our findings also parallel those of Tellier (2008) with children and Kelly et al. (2009) with adults, who found that gestures during word learning enhance memory across age groups. The improvement in one-week retention in the gesture group of our study is a strong indicator of the "stickiness" that gesture-based learning provides. This can be explained by **dual coding theory** – gestures likely provided an additional memory code (a visuospatial representation) alongside the verbal code, making forgetting less likely. Additionally, from an embodied cognition standpoint, having the teacher visually and physically represent the word meanings could have enabled learners to form embodied representations of those words in their minds, thereby reinforcing neural connections (this aligns with neurological evidence that gestures activate memory-related brain regions and sensorimotor areas when learning words). Our observational note that some students imitated gestures suggests that students were not just passive recipients of gesture input but sometimes became physically involved, which research by Goldin-Meadow (2014) suggests can further deepen learning – in fact, Goldin-Meadow observed that learners generating their own gestures can have an even greater impact on learning than simply watching the teacher's gestures. We did not explicitly ask students to gesture in our study, but this could be a fruitful area for extension: encouraging students to "gesture along" might amplify the effects even more.

**Role of Facial Expressions – Motivation and Feedback:** While facial expressions alone did not significantly raise test scores in our experiment, their effect emerged in the interaction with gestures and, importantly, in students' subjective responses. This suggests that facial expressions contribute to the *quality* of the learning experience more than to the raw retention of vocabulary. Students taught by an expressive-faced teacher reported feeling more engaged and confident. This finding resonates with the concept of **teacher immediacy** – behaviors (like smiling, eye contact) that convey warmth and approachability. High immediacy has been linked to greater student motivation and lower anxiety.

**Pedagogical Implications:** The convergence of our study with existing research makes a strong case for language teachers to **intentionally integrate gestures and facial expressions** into their teaching practice. Here are some applications and considerations for the classroom:

- *Teaching Vocabulary and Grammar:* Teachers should incorporate appropriate gestures when introducing new vocabulary, expressions, or even grammatical structures. For example, when teaching action verbs, performing the action (a form of *TPR*) can help learners link the word to its meaning.
- *Aiding Comprehension in L2:* In second language classrooms where the target language is used as the medium of instruction, gestures and facial expressions are invaluable for making input





comprehensible. Rather than resorting to translation or lengthy explanations in L1, a teacher can use a quick gesture or facial expression to clarify meaning on the spot.

- *Classroom Management and Emotional Support:* Teachers' non-verbal behavior can manage the classroom climate. A warm smile or encouraging thumbs-up can boost a struggling student's confidence without interrupting the class verbally. Maintaining an open, friendly facial expression can encourage more student questions and participation, as it signals approachability. On the flip side, teachers should also be mindful of inadvertent negative facial signals – a frustrated or bored look can discourage students.
- *Student Use of Non-verbals:* While our study focused on teacher behavior, an important pedagogical angle is encouraging students themselves to use gestures when speaking or learning. In communicative activities, teachers can model and also ask learners to try using hand movements to express themselves. This can aid their speech production and recall. A study by Church et al. (2004) found that learners who gestured during math problem explanations actually learned more than those who did not, indicating gestures can reveal and facilitate thought processes.

Given these points, teacher training programs should include components on non-verbal communication skills. Often, language teacher education emphasizes linguistic knowledge and teaching methods but less so the physical delivery of a lesson. Workshops or micro-teaching sessions where teachers practice using gestures and facial expressions – perhaps even recording themselves to self-evaluate their non-verbal clarity – could be highly beneficial. Our results show that such efforts are likely to pay off in terms of student learning outcomes.

**Comparison with Previous Studies:** It's useful to situate our findings relative to prior research to see the broader picture. Our results mostly reinforce the positive narrative around gestures in language education found in the literature. However, there have been some studies with more nuanced outcomes. A meta-analysis by Dargue et al. (2019) noted that while children consistently benefit from gestures, studies with adult learners sometimes show smaller effects. Our study did find a strong effect even with adult learners, perhaps because the vocabulary was concrete enough and the gestures were carefully planned. It's possible that for more complex language learning (like abstract grammar or very advanced topics), gestures need to be more thoughtfully designed to be effective, or their benefit might be more long-term as Lopez-Ozieblo (2024) suggests – with gestures aiding long-term retention even if immediate test scores between groups appear similar. We also add to the limited body of work on facial expressions: there isn't as much prior quantitative evidence on facial cues in SLA, so our finding of “no harm but some benefit” is an important piece. It aligns with intuitive teaching wisdom and communication research that teacher enthusiasm (reflected in facial expressiveness) is generally positive, but also confirms that without accompanying instructional cues, facial expressions alone won't carry the content.

**Limitations:** Our study, while providing valuable insights, had limitations. The controlled nature of the experiment (with a single teacher consciously modulating her behavior) is not fully reflective of natural classroom interaction; in authentic settings, teachers' use of gestures or expressions may be more spontaneous and varied. Also, our focus was on vocabulary learning; different results might emerge for other aspects of language (e.g., grammar learning, pronunciation). For instance, gestures might help with



grammatical concepts or word order (as shown in some studies with signaled hand movements for syntax), and facial expressions might be particularly relevant in teaching pragmatics (like the appropriate emotional tone for apologies vs. requests). Further, our participant sample was relatively homogeneous in terms of proficiency and age; younger learners or lower-proficiency learners might show even more reliance on non-verbal cues, as they have fewer linguistic resources to draw on. Future studies could explore these variables, as well as employ a longitudinal approach to see if teachers adopting more gestures and expressions over a semester yield higher overall proficiency gains in students.

## CONCLUSION

Non-verbal communication, in the form of gestures and facial expressions, has a profound impact on language acquisition, as evidenced by both prior research and the findings of our classroom-based study. In the Introduction, we outlined how gestures and facial expressions serve as powerful channels of meaning and emotion. The Literature Review provided evidence that gestures often act as a second channel for input – reinforcing and clarifying spoken language – and that facial expressions, while researched less, are important for feedback and affective engagement. Our original study’s Methodology detailed a systematic investigation in an authentic classroom context, manipulating these non-verbal behaviors, and the Results demonstrated that teacher’s gestures significantly improved learners’ vocabulary learning and retention, while expressive facial cues boosted engagement and worked best in tandem with gestures. In the Discussion, we interpreted these outcomes through theoretical lenses, compared them with existing studies, and emphasized practical teaching implications.

**Implications for Future Research:** While the present study focused on a specific scenario of vocabulary teaching, future research could explore several avenues. One area is how gestures and facial expressions affect learning of different language elements – for example, does gesturing help in learning grammar (some studies suggest yes, for instance using hand motions to represent tenses or clause structure), or how do facial cues aid listening comprehension (perhaps by providing cues to sentence type – question vs. statement – or speaker intention). Another area is technology in language learning: given our findings and those of studies like Sloan & Carson-Berndsen (2017), developers of language learning software or apps might experiment with animated tutors or virtual reality teachers that use human-like gestures and expressions to see if they enhance user learning. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine whether teachers who consistently use rich non-verbal communication see improvements in overall student proficiency and confidence over a semester or year.

**Conclusion:** Gestures and facial expressions are often called the “*unspoken*” aspects of language, but as this article has shown, their impact on language acquisition speaks volumes. For language educators aiming to maximize their students’ learning, the recommendation is to **embrace an animated teaching style**: explain with your words, but also **illustrate with your hands** and **express with your face**. Such an approach not only helps students grasp and remember the language better, but also creates a lively, engaging learning environment where communication is vivid and meaningful beyond words. In essence, effective language teaching is a performance of both verbal and non-verbal language – and when done well, learners will not only hear and read the new language, but also *see* it, *feel* it, and ultimately, internalize it more successfully.



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