

## **Effect of Educators' Immediacy on Prospective Teachers' Learning**

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Immediacy is the patronising behaviour of teacher to reduce physical, emotional and social distance from students through verbal and nonverbal cues and gestures. Prospective teachers tend to imitate the behaviours they learn from their educators to their respective classes, therefore, their perception and reaction to immediacy in learning was needed to be investigated. The present descriptive and experimental research provided the significant empirical evidence that the prospective teachers not only liked and accepted educators' immediacy but also showed substantially better learning achievement than those taught by the nonimmediate educators.

**Keywords:** immediacy, learning achievement, empirical evidence, experimental research

### **Introduction**

Teacher's immediacy is the term used to describe communication behaviours that reduce the perceived distance between teacher and students. The concept of immediacy was coined by Mehrabian in late 1960s as, "the behaviour which increases mutual sensory stimulation between two people" (1972, p.6), a type of approach behaviour that he felt reflected closeness and positive attitude towards the other (1968, 1972).

As research on the immediacy construct had developed, it was targeted by social and psychological researchers and they commented on its diverse dimensions, "Communication scholars identified a variety of functions served by immediacy cues i.e. immediacy behaviours indicate warmth and positive regard among people, communicate interpersonal involvement and approach, show availability and inclusion, and increase sensory stimulation" (Andersen, Andersen, & Jensen, 1979).

In this context, teacher immediacy refers to the verbal and nonverbal communication expressed by teachers that reduces both physical and psychological distance between teachers and students (Andersen, 1979; Gorham, 1988).

Human communication, according to Neuliep (1997), is comprises the context in which it occurs. Thus, in addition to the verbal and nonverbal codes that are exchanged between interactants, the salient features of a communicative situation include the physical, sociological, and psychological environments. The physical environment includes the actual geographical location of the interaction (e.g., an office, classroom). The sociological environment encompasses the relationship between the interactants (e.g., superior-subordinate, teacher-student). The psychological environment consists of the attitudes, motivations, and cognitive behaviours of the interactants. Each of these environments provides a wealth of information to the interactants about how to communicate.

In addition to subject competence, teaching style and vocal eloquence, immediacy of a teacher enhances his or her communicative power and interpersonal relationships with students. Immediacy comprises the nonverbal cues and behaviours that draw attention to the verbal message while reducing physical and/or psychological distance between teachers and students. (Mehrabian in Gotch and Brydges, 1990; Gotch and Brydges, 1990; Andersen 1979; Schaller & DeWine, 1993).

Nonverbal communication can also have a powerful impact on many aspects of our communication with others, including power, synchrony, and immediacy. However, immediacy has been perceived as one of the most powerful dimensions of nonverbal communication and has been one of the most researched topic (Slane & Leak, 1979). Immediacy refers to the idea of liking and disliking because people like to remain close to those whom they like and avoid those whom they dislike (Baringer, & McCroskey, 2000). Nonverbal behaviours that have been proposed to affect the immediacy are such as: "tonality, vocal pace, eye contact, smiling, body tenseness, and trunk and limb movements" (Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1990).

Several researchers investigated the intensity of these cues in communication; for example, a classic study of Mehrabian (1968) reveals that only seven percent of a message is communicated verbally (i.e., through words) while the remaining 93 percent is communicated nonverbally.

Andriate (1982) supported the above view as, "teachers practicing classroom communication behaviours such as professional dress standards, moderate self-disclosure, spontaneous smiling, sweeping eye contact, positive feedback to student responses, and relaxed bodily postures may optimise student learning". Moreover, Basow and Distenfeld (1983) and Haskin (2002) declared that teachers who smiled positively and expressed enthusiasm were viewed by students as being more student-oriented, organised, stimulating, knowledgeable, and having more rapport than non-expressive teachers.

One of the most consistent and important findings in the literature is that teacher immediacy has a positive effect on perceived cognitive learning (Christophel, 1990; Gorham, 1988; Gorham & Zakahi, 1990; Neuliep, 1995; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987; Sanders & Wiseman, 1990), affective learning (Andersen, 1979; Andersen, Norton, & Nussbaum, 1981; Christophel, 1990; Gorham, 1988; Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985; McCroskey, Richmond, Sallinen, Fayer, & Barraclough, 1995; Moore, Masterson, Christophel, & Shea, 1996; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Sanders & Wiseman, 1990), and willingness of students to engage in the lessons,

theories, and practices assigned or taught in their courses (Andersen, 1979; Christophel, 1990; Gorham, 1988; Sanders & Wiseman, 1990). In related research, Comstock, Rowell, and Bowers (1995) found that "nonverbal teacher immediacy and cognitive, affective, and behavioural learning were curvilinearly related in an inverted U curve; that is, moderately high teacher immediacy is more effective in helping students to learn than either excessively high or low immediacy."

The research so far has shown a positive correlation between the use of immediacy behaviours and the overall learning of the student (Allen, & Shaw, 1990; Christophel, 1990; Rodriguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996; Menzel, & Carrell, 1999). However, many of these articles fail to agree on exactly how the immediacy behaviours affect the learning of the students in the classroom. Andersen (1985) argues that teacher behaviours generate arousal in students which affect either positively or negatively.

Immediacy-linked behaviours are valued positively and get warm appreciation in larger power distance cultures for example in Asia or Pakistan, where there is a great distance among students and teachers and there is a strict hierarchy among family members also; typically, the father rules authoritatively, followed by the eldest son and moving down the ladder by age and sex.

Myers (1998) explores that instructors require effective immediacy in the classroom and that students perceive instructor's nonverbal communication influential for their learning. Therefore, it was useful to investigate what level of immediacy was practised by the educators in teachers training institutes of Pakistan and how much they had succeeded to inculcate it in their pupil teachers to improve interrelationships among their students.

Rourke, et al.'s (2001) found that there were 1604 teacher verbal immediacy indicators (143 affective, 333 interactive, and 1128 cohesive). They also found that a meaningful relationship between overall teacher immediacy and overall learning was significant.

In overall learning attributable to overall teacher immediacy, statistically significant differences were obtained between the results from survey-questionnaire research.

Despite the great trend of student teacher interactive relationship in the world, there is a little single research about verbal and nonverbal immediacy in Pakistan. Khan and Nasim (2009) in their research concluded that “teacher immediacy has considerable effect on students’ learning. Overall female students perceived more effect of teacher immediacy as compare to male students. Verbal and non-verbal communication is the fundamental part of teaching and learning”. Having a specific culture, practically there is a great social distance among teachers and students in our educational institutions. Some recent researches related to the importance of immediacy are in process these days, however, no empirical evidence has yet attained to conclude some principles. For the reason, researcher felt dire need for investigating this ignored dimension of classroom communication. Moreover, educators’ classroom behaviour or communicational style is extremely important because it transfers to the next generation through prospective teachers who along with content borrow the communicative style of their educators also. It is assumed that they idealise and imitate educators’ style as a practical teaching strategy and practice it to their coming students. How immediate or non-immediate educators influence the learning of their students comprises the present research questions:

1. What is the prospective teachers’ attitude towards educators’ immediacy?
2. Is there a significant difference between the pupil teachers’ achievement of by an immediate and a non-immediate educator?

Following the research question, the null hypothesis was “there is no significant difference in the pupil teachers’ achievement imparted by an immediate and that of a non-immediate educator”.

### **Methodology**

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase was descriptive in nature while the second phase had a two-group posttest experimental design. After the pretest, independent variable of teachers’ immediacy (immediate and non-immediate teaching) was introduced to the two groups of

students of intact B.Ed class for the period of three months. Finally the scores on the post test of both groups were compared to find out the effect of immediacy on the learning of prospective teachers.

### **Population**

Prospective teachers of session 2008-2009 at Govt. College for Elementary Teachers for Women Sharaqpur were the population of the study.

### **Sample**

The whole population was the sample of the study for being the intact class group having 52 students.

### **Research Design and the instrument**

The research was conducted in two phases: the first phase was descriptive in nature and the second phase had a posttest experimental design.

**Phase I:** A Standardized instrument having 23 items at Likert Scale named as. “Effect of teachers’ immediacy” by Crump, C.A. (1996) was administered to the intact group of 52 B.Ed students on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2008, to find out their attitude towards teacher’s immediacy as well as an open ended question was included for selection of the most and the least immediate faculty members who were taking classes during the session 2008-2009. The educator getting highest votes by the students for being an immediate educator was regarded as the most immediate and the educator having lowest votes on the questionnaire was regarded as the least or non-immediate educator.

The scores on the standardised instrument were analysed by calculating overall average mean. For each positive item i.e favourable to the characteristics of educator’s immediacy, scores were assigned as; 5 for ‘Strongly agreed’, 4 for ‘agreed’, 3 for ‘neutral’, 2 for ‘disagreed’ and 1 for ‘strongly disagreed’. While for negative statements i.e. unfavourable for immediacy the scores assigned as 1 for ‘strongly agreed’, 2 for ‘agreed’, 3 for ‘neutral’, 4 for ‘disagreed’ and five for ‘strongly disagreed’.

For each of the participant, the score for all 23 statements was added and then divided to the number of statements i.e. 23 to find the average score. The scores for all the 52 participants was then added and divided by 52 to find out the average

mean. The obtained mean was  $4.23 > 2.50$  (the neutral value), which declared that students had substantially positive attitude towards educator's immediacy.

For the open ended question about nominating the most immediate educator and non-immediate educator, the educator voted by 36 out of 52 students as the most immediate was regarded as the immediate and the educator who got 34 out of 52 votes for having non immediate behaviour was regarded as the most non immediate educator.

**Phase II:** The second phase of the research had the posttest two group experimental designs. The design involved two groups, both of which were formed by equal distribution of the twenty six matched pairs into two groups. This design was selected to control internal invalidity because combination of equal distribution and the presence of pretest controlled the threat of internal validity. Both groups were administered a pretest of the dependent variable, i.e, learning achievement on the course of general methods of teaching at B.Ed level. As according to Gay (1997) 'matching is a technique for equating groups on one or more variables the researcher has identified as being highly related to performance on the dependent variable,'. Thus fifty two subjects of the intact class of B.Ed at Govt. College for Elementary Teachers (W) Sharaqpur were equally distributed into two groups on the basis of scores in the pretest administered on 23rd November 2008 having 26 multiple choice items, that is, two subjects having similar scores were taken as a pair and then one member was sent to each group. Consequently, the resulted match groups were identical with respect to the scores on pretest. The group one was named as "experimental group" (immediate) and group two as "control group" (non-immediate) both having 26 members in each.

After the pretest, one group received coaching for three months by the immediate teacher determined by the scores on the instrument and the other group was taught by the non-immediate teacher for the same period. Both of the groups were taught five chapters from the outline of the course 'General methods of teaching' at B.Ed level.

Both of the educators used lecture, demonstration and discussion method to communicate the content but the immediate educator followed the indicators of immediacy as she maintained eye contact with students during the class and used to smile during class discussion; she walked to the last benches to reduce the physical distance with all students, called students with their names, conveyed the content through verbal and nonverbal variations, showed timely facial and bodily expressions, encouraged students with patting, presented her personal examples to elaborate the content, casually showed humorous behaviour to lighten the classroom atmosphere, owned the class with words 'our' and 'us', encouraged the students to discuss their problems before and after the class and attended them equally and justifiably. On the other hand, the non-immediate educator had no eye contact with her students, she presented the content in monotone without smile, didn't call students' names, showed no humour during delivering the content, confined to the dice and didn't try to reduce distance with students, remained strict and reserved, showed no facial and body expressions, showed no encouragement to students physically (patting), didn't allow students to talk before and after the class.

After three months of teaching, on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2009 both of the groups were administered a posttest having 25 items, for final learning achievement on the mentioned above five chapters of "General Methods of Teaching" at B.Ed level.

### Analysis

**Table 1: Descriptive analysis of Phasel**

No of Statements	No of participants	Total Score Average for one statement	Obtained score average
23	52	5	4.23

The table 1 shows that there were 23 statements that were marked by 52 students of B.Ed class and they got average of 4.23 out of maximum score 5 for each one of 23 statements. The obtained score  $4.23 > 2.50$  (the neutral value) and declared substantial positive attitude of B.Ed students towards educators' immediacy.

In the experimental phase, the 52 students of

the intact B.Ed class were administered a pretest of the dependant variable, ‘learning in the course general methods of teaching at B.ed level’. Both pre and psot test were similar and were composed of multiple type items.. All measures to ensure its validity and reliability were taken. The obtained scores of students were arranged and matched pairs were made on the basis of their similar scores. One student of every matched pair was sent to the each identical group. The group one was taught by the immediate educator and the group two was taught by the nonimmediate educator. After employing the independent variables (educator’s immediacy and nonimmediacy) for three months, the subjects of both groups were administered a post test on the dependant variable (learning in the course general methods of teaching at B.ed level).

The data obtained was analysed both descriptively and inferentially. According to Gay (1997), the appropriate method for comparing the mean score of posttest experimental design is to compare the means of posttest of both groups by dependent sample t-test.

Descriptively the meanscore of posttest of both group one (immediate) and group two (nonimmediate) has been calculated.

**Table 2**

Descriptive Statistics for phase II					
	N	Minim um	Maxim um	Mean	SD
Immediate	26	11.00	23.00	16.96	3.36
Non- immediate	26	6.00	18.00	11.61	3.62

The table 2 indicates that the matched pairs who got similar scores in the pretest were quite different at posttest that was conducted after three months of inducing independent variables. Experimental group which was taught by the immediate educator achieved average of 16.96 score out of total score 25 which was substantially greater than the average score of control group, that is 11.61 out of total score 25. It proved that educators’ immediacy had a positive effect on students’ learning and the empirical data rejected the null hypothesis that, “There is no significant difference in pupil teachers’ achievement imparted by an immediate and that of a non-immediate educator”.

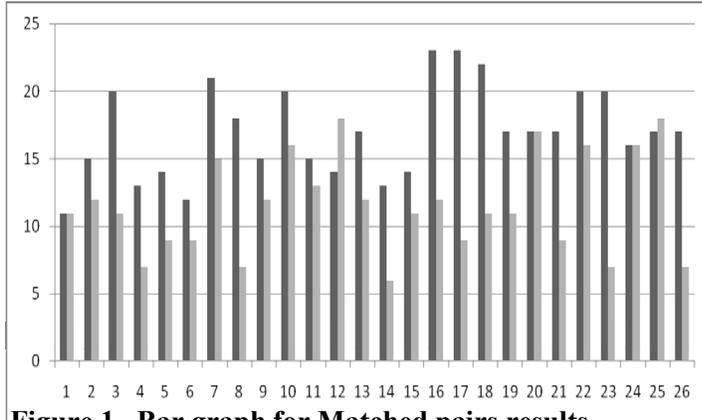
**Table 3: t-test for Post test**

Sr. No	Group	N	Mean	Paired Differences				
				Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	(Immediate) Experimental group	26	16.9615	5.34	4.58	5.944	25	.000
2	(Non- immediate) Control group	26	11.6154					

The table 3 shows that the mean score of the post test of experimental group (immediate) and the control group (non-immediate) were significantly

different. The t value  $5.94 > 2.060$ , the table value at degree of freedom ( $df$ ) = 25. High t value of the post-tests of the two groups indicated that the null

hypothesis, “There is no significant difference in pupil teachers’ achievement imparted by an



**Figure 1** Bar graph for Matched pairs results

The graphical representation above shows pairwise performance of the students of each pair having same score initially in the beginning of the experiment. The **black** bar represents the gain scores of students taught by the immediate educator and the **grey** bar represents the gain scores of students taught by the nonimmediate educator. It clearly shows that the students taught by the immediate educator substantially gained higher scores than the students taught by the nonimmediate educators. Three pairs (1,20 &24) showed equal gain, two pairs (12&25) showed more and in twenty one pairs the students taught by nonimmediate educator obtained less scores than that of taught by the immediate educator. Cumulatively, the students taught by the immediate educator got higher scores than that of the non immediate group.

### Findings

According to the results of present experimental study it was found that:

1. The prospective teachers had a great acceptability to immediate educators as 84.6% students appreciated educators immediacy.
2. The achievement scores of experimental group with mean 16.9615, which was taught by the immediate educator showed substantial raise as compared to the control group with mean 11.6154, taught by the non-immediate educator.
3. The comparison of the meanscore of post tests of both groups declared that there was a

immediate and that of a non-immediate educator” was again rejected.

significant difference with ‘t’ value  $5.94 > 2.060$  (the table value) in the learning achievement of both groups.

4. It was found that educators’ immediacy had a significantly positive effect on the learning of prospective teachers.

### Conclusion

According to the findings of descriptive phase of the research, it was concluded that prospective teachers had great acceptance for immediate educators. Most of the pupil teachers showed interest in educators immediate behaviours. Only few were indifferent to the educator’s communication style. The experimental study provided evidence that teachers’ immediacy had substantial influence on student learning. The students taught by the immediate educator showed substantially better learning than the group which was taught by the nonimmediate teacher. The research proved that the prospective teachers not only like and accept educators immediacy but also show better learning if taught by an immediate educator.

### Discussion

Though communicative style of teachers have been discussed a lot in the literature, immediacy bears special meaning that have been discussed under topics of teacher personality.

Interestingly, teacher’s immediacy is the key point of student centered as well as teacher centered curriculum. As the researcher has presented the empirical evidence that teachers’ closeness and personal relationship with students enhance their learning. These days corporal punishment, teachers’ indifferent or Laissez Faire attitude toward students’ social and mental background are the major causes of high dropout in our public schools.

To overcome such problems, it is needed to attract the students with providing sense of security, safety, belongingness, self esteem and personal encouragement. For the purpose, an immediate teacher can only do this by calling students with their names, keeping affectionate eye contact with them, moving around the class, patting the students on doing good job, giving personal examples,

keeping easy posture before the class, explaining with appropriate body and hand gestures, friendly smile and timely facial expressions. The teacher can get high acceptance by appropriate vocal variation, using comfortable, less formal but professional dress, spending time with students inside and outside the class to encourage and appreciate students for consulting him or her for academic or social problem. Sometimes greetings, humour, useful games, compatative and cooperative team wok with students to promote likeliness for the teacher is essential because such behaviours are the root for the motivation for learning.

The above discussion and results of the present study about prospective teachers in Pakistan advocate that our teachers should adopt immediacy in the classroom and leave the unreal notion of aloofness from students as well as from faculty members to provide students with pleasant atmosphere for studies and make schoolculture democratic,creative and progressive.

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