

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LECTURERS' PARALANGUAGE AND STUDENTS' SATISFACTION IN UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA, KEDAH, MALAYSIA

*Rosliza Binti Md. Zani
Sarah Binti Sabir Ahmad
Farah Merican Binti Isahak Merican
Intan Nazrenee Binti Ahmad*

*Faculty of Business Administration,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah, Peti Surat 187,
08400 Merbok, Kedah, Malaysia
email : rosliza568@kedah.uitm.edu.my*

Satisfaction among students has become an essence particularly in an education industry. The industry is growing rapidly and competition is intense. Every organization is trying to become the most preferred education provider, especially in Malaysia and communication is the most important element to be stressed on to ensure students' satisfaction on services provided. Past researches indicated that, most meaning of conversational messages comes from non-verbal communication. Evaluation on students' perception on lecturers' paralanguage that would lead to their satisfaction to the services provided was examined. The results of the study illustrated that paralanguage which include vocal pitch, vocal loudness, pitch variation, pauses and fluency were shown to have an impact on students' satisfaction. Therefore, from this study, it can be inferred that students' in Malaysian universities are mostly observant on the vocal pitch of their lecturers when lectures are delivered to them. The present study caters for a wide variety of students and development professionals, especially those who are interested in non-verbal communication specifically paralanguage-related issues. It is highly hoped that the information gleaned from the present study may assist all service employees specifically in understanding better, the importance of paralanguage and its effects on students' satisfaction.

Keywords: *Non-verbal communication, Paralanguage, Students' satisfaction.*

Introduction

Education industry is growing rapidly in today's competitive environment. Competition is intense and every organization is trying to become the most preferable education provider, particularly in Malaysia. Thus, these organizations are focusing on students' satisfaction as a means to realize their objective to be the successful education provider. In education industry specifically, communication is the most important element to be stressed on to ensure satisfaction among students on services provided. This will lead to success or failure of their organization. The higher learning institution as the education provider should be aware that communication does not only comprise of verbal element, but much more beyond that. Studies have been carried out and it was concluded that 65% of the meaning of conversational messages comes from non-verbal cues, leaving only 35% to verbal communication (Philpot, 1983). Thus, such information will provide the basis for improvement in communication skills and contribute to make difference.

Non-verbal communication is composed of the messages we send without or in addition to words. These messages have a strong impact on us as receivers. Often, action speaks so loudly that they drown out spoken words. This happens because we use non-verbal communication symbols as a means to determine what sender really feels and the degree of importance the sender attach to the message and to us (Means, 2004).

Means (2004) also said that spoken or written symbols make up of verbal part of a message and are accompanied by non-verbal symbols. However, a non-verbal message may not have a verbal counterpart. Nonverbal symbols which include body language, appearance, touch, space, time and voice exist in written and oral communication as well as in the environment. Research indicates that when verbal and non-verbal symbols conflict, the receiver usually believes the non-verbal messages.

Although the verbal communication in service industry and its effects on customer satisfaction has been investigated widely, the nonverbal aspects and its effects on customer satisfaction in service industry mainly education remained virtually unexplored in the marketing literature. The services characterized by considerable interpersonal contact are likely to benefit greatly from an investigation of the role of nonverbal communication on students' evaluations of service experiences. But not much research has been done on lecturers' nonverbal behavior despite its importance to students' satisfaction.

What is Paralanguage?

Paralanguage involves the nonverbal symbols that accompany a verbal message and reveal the difference between what is said and how it is said (Means, 2004). Paralanguage is an indication for vocal tones that is used in communication which shows different interpretation when construed. For example, a communicator might use a verbal statement to convey confidence, e.g., "I am positively sure that..." But listeners will consciously and unconsciously interpret the paralanguage to assess the communicator's degree of confidence.

According to Means (2004), paralanguage includes pitch, stress rate, volume, inflection, rhythm and pronunciation. It also includes laughing, crying, sighing, grunting, yawning, belching and coughing. Even silence, pauses and hesitation are part of paralanguage. Mortensen (1972) added on to this finding by stating that paralanguage is on the meaning associated with vocal intonation and cues of vocal quality- pitch, rate, timbre, and volume. People depend on our vocal quality and intonation to indicate our mood, personality and affect displays.

Research reveals that when a listener or receiver attempts to judge where the speaker or source is on a contempt-affection continuum, they rely more on the tone of the voice than on the content of the message. This fact is evident from Argyle *et al.*'s (1970) study that found that even when the content of the message was disturbed by means of random splicing of the tape, listeners were able to detect the emotions expressed in the message based only on the tone of the voice. Thill and Bovee (2001) pointed out that like body language; voice carries both intentional and unintentional messages. Vocal characteristics also reveal many things that a person's unaware of. The tone and volume of voices, the accent of speaking pace, and all the little "um's" and "ah's" that creep into a person's speech says a lot about who the person is, the relationship with the audience and the emotions underlying the person's words.

Ruben (1988) pointed out that although what we say; the words, phrases and sentences are important to communication, the way we use language can be even more important than our words as sources of information. Paralanguage, sometimes called vocalic refer to any cues created in the process of verbalizing other than the words themselves. This includes sniff and sneezes, pitch, rate of speech, nasality, pauses and even silence. With spoken language, loudness, rate of speaking, tone, pitch variation and uses of pauses can have major influence on whether and how one can react to the words.

Further, studies on vocal characteristics have revealed that fluent speech that is free of long pauses, hesitations, and repetitions is considered more credible than non-fluent speech (Erickson *et al.*, 1978). However, brief to moderate pauses tend to enhance perceptions of credibility and trustworthiness (Scherer, 1982). Similarly, pitch variation was shown also to enhance perceptions of competence and sociability (Scherer, 1982). On the other hand, halting, long pauses, increasing and decreasing tempo, and higher pitch were associated with negative affect and anxiety (Siegman, 1978). Ruben (1988) said that particularly in speech, paralanguage can also provide the basis for assumptions about the speaker's educational level, interest in the topic, level of comfort and self-concept, regard for the audience, personality, and mood. Moreover, tone, pitch, rate of speech and volume provide clues as to an individual's emotional state.

On the basis of pitch, speech rate, vocal intensity, and inflection, communication theorists have classified speech delivery patterns into a conversational style (lower pitch, slower rate, lower to moderate volume, and less inflection) and a public speaking or dynamic style (higher pitch, faster, high vocal intensity, higher inflection) (Pearce & Conklin, 1971; Pearce & Brommel, 1972). An investigation of how listeners responded to these two styles revealed that speakers who used a conversational style were rated as trustworthy, kind, warm, friendly, and pleasant, while those who used a public speaking style were associated with dynamism, dominance, and competence (Pearce & Conklin, 1971).

In addition, Tubbs and Moss (2000) said that paralanguage refers to something beyond or in addition to language itself. Paralanguage has two components: voice qualities such as pitch, range, resonance, lip control and articulation control; and vocalizations or noises without linguistic structure, such as crying, laughing and grunting. Morreale *et al.*, (2001) suggested that most communication instructors agreed that variety in the use of communication elements is essential to being perceived as persuasive, competent and dynamic. By speaking louder and without hesitation, within reason of course, people will be perceived as more confident as well as more attractive.

Research Framework and hypotheses

Based on the review of literatures concerning the study variable on non-verbal communication (paralanguage) and customer satisfaction, the theoretical framework for this study is presented as in Figure 1 below.

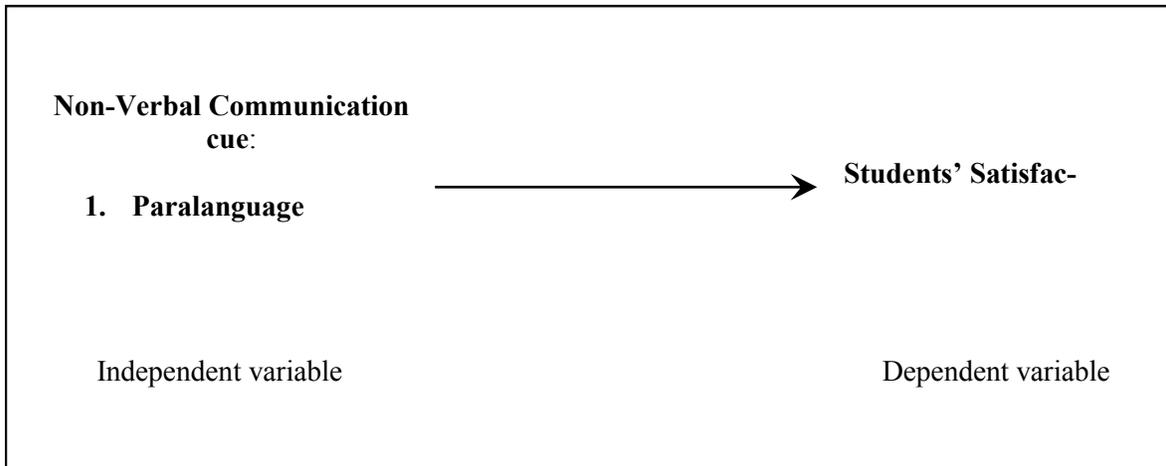


Figure 1. The research model.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between paralanguage and students' satisfaction.

H₂: Paralanguage is the most dominant non-verbal communication cue to student satisfaction.

Methodology

Sampling Design

To have a representative finding, the sampling technique used must be objective. This is an important effort adopted by most researchers in order to furnish a finding pertinent to the general. The non probability sampling technique in which units of the sample are selected on the basis of convenience or personal judgment sampling is used in this study. Using this sampling technique was to ensure every unit in the population had an equal chance to be selected as the sample of this study. This method was also used in order to obtain a large number of completed questionnaires quickly and economically, due to time and budget constraints.

Population and sample size

The unit of analysis for this study is individual student of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah. A total number of 300 samples were collected from various courses in UiTM Kedah. In determining the sample size for this study, the sample size selected was based on the criteria set according to Roscoe's rule of thumb (as cited in Sekaran, 2003) i.e. a sample that is larger than 30 and less than 500 is appropriate for most research, and the size must be several times larger (10 times or more) for multiple regression analysis to be conducted.

Findings

The empirical evidence from the present study had identified that the non-verbal communication cues (i.e. kinesics, paralanguage and proxemics) contributed to students’ satisfaction in the context of lecturers in UiTM Kedah. It indicated that there was a significant relationship between all these independent variables to students’ satisfaction. This finding is aligned with findings from Sundram and Webster (2000), Gabbott and Hogg (2000), Fatt (1998) and Haktanir and Harris (2005) which also indicated that there was a significant relationship of non-verbal communication cues to customer satisfaction. The findings are accordance, which would suggest that the way customers like to be treated are similar at any given time and place.

Among all the non-communication cues mentioned, paralanguage has a significant impact on students’ satisfaction. This study is supported by a research carried out by Means (2004) that mentioned that paralanguage involves the nonverbal symbols that accompany a verbal message and reveal the difference between what is said and how it is said. As it is important to satisfy the students, proper vocal pitch and tone used will help the students to learn better and adapt better to learning environment.

As the present study had proven that all the variables of non-verbal communication cues (including paralanguage) contribute to the level of students’ satisfaction, it is important for each individual (in this context, the lecturers) to understand their non-verbal behavior as every unspoken behavior provides some impact to their students’ satisfaction. Besides, the findings also indicate that students’ satisfaction is not only on how well the lecturers verbal communication are, but proof a significant result that non-verbal communication plays an important determinant to students’ satisfaction too.

The results of the analysis are shown in the following tables:-

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (N = 210)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Paralanguage	3.45	0.493
Students’ Satisfaction	3.70	0.574

Table 2: Regression analysis

Variables	Beta
Independent variables:	
Paralanguage	0.240**
R ²	0.238
R ² Change	0.238
Adjusted R ²	0.228
F Change	22.97
Sig- F	0.00

Notes: **p < 0.00, *p < 0.05

Table 3: Summary of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Results
H ₁ : There is a significant relationship between paralanguage and students’ satisfaction	Accepted
H ₂ : Paralanguage is the most dominant non-verbal communication	Rejected

Future Improvements of Paralanguage for a Better Students’ Satisfaction

Previous studies have proven that non-verbal communication is one of the important elements in ensuring satisfaction among customers in service industries. The findings of our study also indicated that non-verbal communica-

tion guarantees satisfaction among students at UiTM Kedah. The service provider, particularly UiTM Kedah must pay more attention to non-verbal communication of its lecturers to give ultimate satisfaction to students. Gabbott and Hogg (2000) pointed out that students tend to feel dissatisfied with service provider which has non-verbal communication cues that were rated at moderate or bad level. Thus, the first step for management of universities to overcome this situation is by organizing a non-verbal communication training to the all employees especially lecturers. This move is supported by Jolly (2000) who mentioned that managers in service industries must make sure that employees' non-verbal behavior should be trained in order to act in certain ways to provide the best non-verbal communication behavior as it would lead to customer satisfaction. Therefore, management of universities should be aware of this satisfaction and train their employees to be sensitive to their own non-verbal communication behavior that they portray when delivering services to the customers (students in this context). By being aware of their non-verbal behavior, they will be able to control unwanted non-verbal communication behavior to guarantee students' ultimate satisfaction.

Other than that, management of universities could also conduct a periodic survey of students' satisfaction on lecturers' non-verbal communication behavior. This solution was also suggested by Sundram and Webster (2000) in their article, "The Role of Non-Verbal Communication in Service Encounter". By conducting a periodic survey, the managers would be able to obtain significant results that would indicate changes in the satisfaction level. By having such result, the managements would then be able to conduct a corrective action in order to increase the satisfaction level of the students. In a nutshell, periodic survey would lead to continuous improvements that would enhance the image of the university.

Besides, it is vital for management of service companies to understand the importance of non-verbal communication in providing customer satisfaction and be able to communicate these understandings to service employees. This is to make sure that the employees would first understand what non-verbal communication is. This statement is supported by research conducted by Lemmink and Mattsson (2002). By communicating the understanding of non-verbal communication, the employees would know the importance of non-verbal communication that would provide satisfaction to customers. It was also indicated that given the same situation, non-verbal communication behaviors differ from one individual to another (Jolly, 2000). Consequently, understanding of non-verbal communication among employees would lead to a better service as the lecturers are aware that different students would perceive differently on their non-verbal communication behavior.

Providing feedback on employees' performances on non-verbal communication is also highly recommended. By practicing this, lecturers would be able to analyze the effectiveness of their non-verbal communication behavior and what action to take in order to enhance their performance. Also, managements may also provide incentive for employees to behave in certain way as well as for them to apply in training sessions. Incentive could be in monetary or non-monetary term; depending on the needs of the employees. The best incentive would be the one that suits what the employees want the most. Sundram and Webster (2000) mentioned that the incentive program as a way to enhance employees' motivation in order to portray the best non-verbal communication behavior. Thus, with these students satisfaction could be realized.

Conclusion

Even though past studies have proven that non-verbal communication is an important element in ensuring satisfaction, it remains unexplored. Clearly, the present study has proven that there is a significant relationship of non-verbal communication cues to students' satisfaction in service encounters with lecturers. These findings are aligned with a few previous studies.

People always say, "Action speaks louder than words". Referring to the study by Philpot (1983), he said that 65% of the meaning of conversational messages comes from non-verbal communication cues, leaving only 35% to verbal communication. People's opinions usually are based on the non-verbal communication symbols they observe and how they interpret them. Studies have found that when judging attitude, people based 93% of their judgment on non-verbal symbols and 7% on spoken words (Means, 2004). Thus, the statement of "action speaks louder than words" is fairly true.

The sender of non-verbal communication may be unaware that he or she is sending a non-verbal message. Consequently, he or she may not be aware of the impact that the non-verbal message may have. Since the non-verbal message may be transmitted unconsciously, the sender will not have planned it. Therefore, a non-verbal message can be more reliable than an oral or written message. It is the greatest hope that the new millennium will see more of research on non-verbal communication cues and how it effects students' satisfaction in various aspects; so that more will be aware of the importance of non-verbal communication that we portray in every day life.

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