



Nonverbal Immediacy Behaviors and Communication Anxiety among University Students in EFL

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ABSTRACT

The study was undertaken with 68 public university students at the bachelor's and master's degree levels to compare their communication apprehension (CA) and their nonverbal immediacy behaviors. The research was conducted using a quantitative design, employing the Personal Report on Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) to measure CA and the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report (NIS-S) to measure nonverbal immediacy behaviors. ANOVA was utilized to compare the mean scores of CA and NIS-S of the three groups of university students in the study. No significant differences were found among groups for CA and NIS-S. However, those with lower CA were found to use nonverbal immediacy behaviors more often than those demonstrating higher CA. Moreover, it was indicated that students of different ages vary in their use of nonverbal immediacy

	behaviors. The research results provide insights into how students feel when they use English (L2) and their self-perceptions regarding the use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors. These insights can help teachers and university administrators foster and maintain positive relationships and trust with students, which are essential for the well-being of all parties involved in teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the university level. Keywords: university students, Communication Apprehension (CA), nonverbal immediacy behaviors, EFL
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Introduction

English is taught in Thailand as a foreign language and is still regarded as an important tool for obtaining good employment opportunities and achieving career advancement. At the university level, it is offered both as compulsory and elective courses. However, there are some obstacles that students face when learning and practicing English, including communication anxiety or communication apprehension (CA) (McCroskey, 2001), especially when they use English (L2). Machell et al. (2016) also found that CA has a substantial number of negative impacts on EFL students. In addition, according to SLA (Second Language Acquisition) theory, language acquisition increases in the context of low-anxiety situations (Krashen, 1982).

In addition to oral communication, nonverbal communication plays a crucial role for everyone, including students learning English. Nonverbal immediacy behaviors are particularly effective in fostering interpersonal relationships. Especially in educational communication, nonverbal immediacy behavior is considered to enhance a variety of academic objectives, including cognitive learning and motivation to learn new things (Ozmen, 2011).

Generally speaking, the main goal of educational institutions, especially at the tertiary level, is student success. In terms of the English language, seen as a lingua franca, students from diverse faculties and academic levels within the university setting—ranging from bachelor's to master's and Ph.D. programs—are required to engage in English language studies. The content and number of English courses vary according to their disciplines and levels of study.

Within teacher-student contexts in educational settings, especially in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching, teachers often face uncertainties when students fail to understand the lessons but refrain from asking questions or directly expressing their lack of comprehension. This

might be because of students' high CA, as Amara (2018) posited that high CA students would not seek help from teachers, even when needed. However, when teacher evaluations are done by the students, they may aggressively express frustration that stems from not being satisfied with the teacher's teaching performance. At that time, the teacher would not have an opportunity to address the concerns of that particular group of students. Instead, improvements can only be implemented in the following semester, which may be too late.

Hence, students' nonverbal communication in EFL classrooms may offer important clues as to whether they are engaged and comfortable in the class. That is, if the teacher understands students' nonverbal communication, especially their nonverbal immediacy behavior, they may be able to recognize whether students are satisfied with their teaching performance or understand that students differ in how they express such behaviors. In this sense, awareness of students' tendencies in using nonverbal immediacy behaviors can help teachers reduce uncertainty, allowing them to predict students' behavior more easily (Berger & Douglas, 1981).

In terms of communication, besides an awareness of nonverbal immediacy behaviors, oral communication is another crucial construct that can help EFL teachers run their classes more smoothly. If a teacher knows their students' communication traits, especially as it pertains to trait-like anxiety, courses can be designed more appropriately. As communication apprehension (CA) in oral communication can also influence various aspects of interaction, this study examined whether different levels of CA affect the use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors. In addition, because students differ by academic level and discipline—particularly with respect to age—it may be useful for teachers to understand how these differences shape nonverbal expressions of friendliness. Such insights could help identify whether undergraduate and graduate students vary in their use of nonverbal behaviors in tertiary education settings. Nonetheless, few studies have examined students' nonverbal immediacy behaviors, while more research has focused on teachers' nonverbal immediacy behaviors in educational settings. In addition, rarely have communication apprehension (CA) and nonverbal immediacy been studied together in Thai university students.

Therefore, the current study investigated both verbal and nonverbal communication attributes of EFL students who were studying across different academic levels and disciplines at a public university, as well as whether an oral communication trait such as anxiety influences their nonverbal immediacy behaviors. Combining the study of CA and nonverbal immediacy behaviors provides teachers with a more comprehensive understanding of their students, as human communication encompasses both

verbal and nonverbal communication. All in all, this was done with the aim of making teachers more aware of the differences in their students' communication attributes across diverse programs of study, which should enable teachers to address classroom issues earlier or, ideally, to prevent problems altogether.

Research Questions

This research study was guided by the following research questions:

- RQ 1: Do students across varying disciplines and academic levels experience divergent levels of fear or anxiety when they communicate using English (Communication Apprehension in L2)?
- RQ 2: Do students across varying disciplines and academic levels perceive divergent levels of their own nonverbal immediacy behaviors?
- RQ 3: Do students at different CA levels exhibit different non-verbal immediacy behaviors?
- RQ 4: Do students' ages affect nonverbal immediacy behaviors?

Literature Review

What is CA?

CA is an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (McCroskey, 1977, 1982). CA is divided into two types: (1) situational anxiety; and (2) trait-like anxiety. Situational anxiety occurs specifically and consistently in response to a particular, recurring situation (Daly & Buss, 1984). For example, some people get anxious every time they have to give a presentation, or they feel worried before a job interview. The anxiety is identified as "situational anxiety" because it's tied to that specific scenario. On the other hand, trait-like CA refers to a relatively stable individual difference across a variety of situations (Beatty et al., 1998). It reflects a person's general tendency toward communication across contexts and can be understood as the integrated outcome of communication apprehension across the four modes of oral communication: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking. In this study, the emphasis is on trait-like CA.

The origins of CA are complex and can be attributed to several factors. Research in communication and psychology suggests that communication apprehension is a learned behavior that often originates from

adverse early-life experiences with communication. Other causes include fear of failure or negative evaluation, as individuals may be afraid of being judged, misunderstood, or rejected by their audience (McCroskey, 2001). Low self-esteem and a lack of confidence in one's abilities can increase anxiety about communicating (McCroskey et al., 1977). Perceived communication deficiencies can also cause CA because some people might believe they lack the necessary skills to communicate effectively, leading to avoidance and anxiety. Some scholars posit that CA is hereditary (Beatty et al., 1998; Opt & Loffredo, 2000). They define the cause as communibiology (Beatty et al., 1998; McCroskey & Beatty, 2000), a concept proposing that genetic factors play a significant role in shaping individuals' communication behaviors.

The effects of CA can be profound, impacting an individual's personal, academic, and professional life. People with high CA often resort to avoidance behaviors, which can limit their opportunities and development. Students with high CA may get lower grades (Frymier, 2005). Minj et al. (2024) found that highly apprehensive students often withdraw from situations requiring communication, either inside or outside the classroom. Ordoubadi et al. (2023) ascertained that foreign language achievement and CA are negatively correlated. In a professional setting, those with high CA may avoid jobs that require a lot of interaction, potentially limiting their career growth and earning potential.

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)

The most widely used tool for measuring CA is the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), developed by James C. McCroskey (McCroskey, 2001; see Appendix A). It consists of 24 items that assess an individual's apprehension across four contexts: public speaking, group discussions, meetings, and dyadic conversations.

What is nonverbal communication?

Communication in any other form than the spoken word is considered nonverbal communication (Greene et al., 1994; Hall et al., 2005). This encompasses nonverbal codes expressed through the face, head, eyes, hands, body, voice, interpersonal distance, and orientation.

According to Birdwhistell (1955), nonverbal communication, which includes body language and paralanguage, accounts for approximately 90% of the conveyed meaning, particularly in contexts involving feelings, emotions, and attitudes. As a result, nonverbal communication can have a greater impact than verbal communication in certain sensitive contexts. This finding

contrasts with common assumptions, as communicators are typically evaluated primarily based on their verbal communication, often with little consideration of their nonverbal behaviors. In addition, Barnum and Wolniansky (1989) identify that nonverbal communication is very important as a complement to verbal communication for effective communication.

What is nonverbal immediacy behavior?

The term ‘immediacy’ was coined by Mehrabian (1971). It is a behavior through which people show warmth, availability, and decrease the psychological distance between communicators. Overall, it creates a general impression of how friendly and involved a person is (Anderson, 1985).

Scholars have proposed various definitions of nonverbal immediacy behaviors. Sundaram and Webster (2000) suggest that they are behaviors that convey intimacy and non-dominance include smiling, light laughter, and frequent eye contact. Meanwhile, Prager (1995) states that nonverbal immediacy behaviors include smiling, close conversational distancing, touch, and vocal warmth. Specific nonverbal cues considered characteristics associated with non-dominance, intimacy, friendliness, and courtesy are frequent eye contact, an open body posture, forward body lean, casual smiling, and light laughter (Sundaram & Webster, 2000).

Nonverbal immediacy behaviors have been found to be associated with positive outcomes, especially in classroom contexts (Witt et al., 2004), as they communicate interpersonal warmth, social support, and relational closeness (Jones & Guerrero, 2001; Prager, 1995). McCroskey and Richmond (2000) assert that “the more communicators employ immediacy behaviors the more others will like, evaluate highly, and prefer such communicators; and the less communicators employ immediate behaviors, the more others will dislike, evaluate negatively, and reject such communicators” (p. 86).

When compared to verbal communication, nonverbal communication, or body language as well as paralanguage, is usually expressed with more honesty (Turaev et al., 2023). However, Ambady and Rosenthal (1988) revealed that people with poor mental health are unable to interpret nonverbal cues. Moreover, individuals with depression were found to speak slower and use fewer hand gestures and facial expressions. Essentially, they discovered that individuals with a high level of anxiety had difficulty establishing eye contact and could not relax; in other words, those with high anxiety tended to exhibit fewer nonverbal immediacy behaviors. In extreme cases, İnak and Okray (2021) contend that individuals with symptoms at the psychopathological level display even lower levels of nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

However, it has been found that normally training can enhance nonverbal immediacy behaviors. This is because nonverbal behaviors can be expressed both intentionally and unintentionally through multiple channels of communication (Nussbaum, 1984; Richmond et al., 2011).

Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report (NIS-S)

The NIS-S, developed by Richmond et al. (2003), consists of 26 items divided into 13 positive and 13 negative items using a five-point Likert-type scale (see Appendix B.). The scale represents eight different types of nonverbal behavior. A high score on the scale indicates that the level of using nonverbal immediacy behavior is high, while a low score indicates that the level of using these behaviors is low.

The NIS-S can be used as a self-report or an observer report in various contexts of communication, including interpersonal, organizational, and instructional areas. Most of the time, this scale is used as an observer report of a teacher's behavior in the classroom. Its use as a self-report measure for students is rare, likely because the teacher has traditionally been considered the central figure in classroom activities. However, with the growing adoption of student-centered approaches in EFL classrooms, teachers are now encouraged to act as facilitators rather than the focal point, in order to achieve optimal educational outcomes. In light of this, researchers are interested in investigating diverse groups of students in terms of their nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The current research study opted for a quantitative approach as a way to seek answers to the four research questions. The sampling methods employed were both purposive and convenient, as the participants were students of one of the researchers, making data collection more feasible. The sample included bachelor's degree students in a special program using Thai as the medium of instruction (non-EMI), master's degree students in a Thai-medium program (non-EMI), and master's degree students in a program using English as the medium of instruction (EMI). All students participating in this research were enrolled in different EFL subjects during the first semester at the same public university in Bangkok, Thailand.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in the current study was a questionnaire consisting of three parts: (1) demographic data; (2) the PRCA-24 (Personal Report of Communication Apprehension) to measure the levels of anxiety when communicating verbally; and (3) the NIS-S (Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report) to measure the perceptions of the participants regarding how much they utilize nonverbal immediacy behaviors when communicating.

Data Collection

Questionnaires were distributed on the closing day of the semester, when the teaching had ended. They were distributed, returned, and collected on the same day. The participants were students in the following groups: (1) first-year MA students majoring in English ($N = 28$); (2) first-year MA students majoring in Social Science ($N = 27$); and (3) second-year BA students majoring in Social Science ($N = 28$).

The number of returned questionnaires from the students in the study was 68 in total, representing a 77.1% response rate. The breakdown of the returned questionnaires is as follows: (1) first-year MA students majoring in English ($n = 28$); (2) first-year MA students majoring in Social Science ($n = 22$); and second-year BA students majoring in Social Science ($n = 18$).

The ages of the respondents can be divided into three groups as follows: (1) 18-24 years old = 26; (2) 25-29 years old = 22; and (3) 30-57 years old = 22. The age distribution varied across the different programs of study, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Age Range by Type of Student

Type of Student	<i>n</i>	Minimum Age	Maximum Age	Mean Age	Standard Deviation
MA in English	28	22	37	27.75	4.151
MA in Social Science	22	20	57	30.50	7.042
BA in Social Science	18	18	24	19.67	1.283
Total	68	18	57	26.50	6.431

Analytical Tools and Research Design

Statistical analysis was done after the questionnaires were returned. The data was firstly analyzed to obtain basic information on the participants' demographic backgrounds and the overall scores on the PRCA-24 and NIS-S. Subsequent analyses were then conducted in the following steps for each stage.

Stage One: ANOVA was utilized to compare CA among the students in the three different categories.

Stage Two: ANOVA was utilized to compare NIS-S scores among students in the three categories.

Stage Three: The CA of the students in the three different categories was classified into three levels (high, average, and low) and an ANOVA test was used to compare the NIS-S scores across these CA levels.

Stage Four: ANOVA was employed to compare NIS-S scores among students of different ages.

Research Results

Stage One

In order to answer RQ 1, the research was conducted in stage one, in which ANOVA was used to compare CA among students across the three categories.

RQ 1: Do students across varying disciplines and academic levels experience divergent levels of fear or anxiety when they communicate using English (Communication Apprehension in L2)?

Table 2 exhibits the mean scores of trait-like communication apprehension (CA) for the students in the three categories in this study.

Table 2

CA Scores and Descriptive Statistics by Type of Student

Type of Student	n	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
MA in English	28	67.89	17.021	3.217	61.29	74.49	30	99

MA in Social Science	22	66.91	16.639	3.547	59.53	74.25	30	92
BA in Social Science	18	68.06	16.009	3.773	60.09	76.02	37	88
Total	68	67.72	16.395	1.988	63.65	71.59	30	99

Table 3 reveals that, based on the ANOVA test, students from different programs and academic levels at the same university did not exhibit significantly different levels of trait-like CA.

Table 3

ANOVA Test Comparing the Mean CA Scores of each Type of Student

PRCA-24 Score	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	16.618	2	8.309	.030	.970
Within Groups	17993.441	65	276.822		
Total	18010.059	67			

$p \leq 0.05$

Stage Two

In order to answer RQ 2, the research proceeded to stage two, in which ANOVA was used to compare the NIS-S scores among students across the three categories.

RQ 2: Do students across varying disciplines and academic levels perceive divergent levels of their own nonverbal immediacy behaviors?

Table 4 illustrates the average scores of NIS-S for the three categories of students in the current study.

Table 4*NIS-S Scores and Descriptive Statistics of Each Type of Student*

Type of Student	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error	95% Confidence Interval for <i>Mean</i>		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
MA in English	28	94.64	8.736	1.651	91.26	98.03	81	118
MA in Social Science	22	96.82	14.608	3.114	90.34	103.30	61	120
BA in Social Science	18	99.22	11.553	2.723	93.48	104.97	81	127
Total	68	96.56	11.618	1.409	93.75	99.37	61	127

Table 5 indicates that, based on the ANOVA test, students from different disciplines and academic levels did not differ significantly in their self-reported use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

Table 5*ANOVA Test Comparing the Mean NIS-S Scores of each Type of Student*

NIS-S Score	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Between Groups	231.952	2	115.976	.856	.430
Within Groups	8810.812	65	135.551		
Total	9042.760	67			

p ≤ 0.05

Stage Three

In order to answer RQ 3, the research proceeded to stage three. Students' CA across the three categories was classified into three levels, and ANOVA was used to compare the NIS-S scores among these levels.

RQ 3: Do students at different CA levels exhibit different nonverbal immediacy behaviors?

In this study, the levels of communication apprehension (CA) were not classified according to the formula typically used by McCroskey (see

Appendix A) because the number of students in the high and low CA categories was too small, limiting the applicability of inferential statistics. Therefore, the CA levels among students across the three academic levels and fields of study were categorized as follows: (1) high refers to CA scores higher than 80; (2) moderate refers to CA scores ranging from 51 to 80; and (3) low refers to CA scores lower than 51. This was done for the sake of finding out whether students with different CA varied in terms of their use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

Table 6 exhibits the descriptive statistics of NIS-S mean scores categorized by CA level among the students in the study. It is notable that students with a low level of CA were found to have the highest mean scores for the use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors ($Mean = 104.91$), while those with a high level of CA had the lowest mean scores for the use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors ($Mean = 88.13$).

Table 6

NIS-S Scores and Descriptive Statistics of Students in all Categories Divided according to their CA Level

CA Levels of Students of All Types	n	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		NIS-S Scores	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
High (>80)	15	88.13	9.999	2.582	82.60	93.67	61	106
Moderate (51-80)	42	97.38	10.282	1.586	94.18	100.58	72	120
Low (<51)	11	104.91	12.037	3.629	96.82	113.00	87	127
Total	68	96.56	11.618	1.409	93.75	99.37	61	127

Table 7 exhibits that the ANOVA test indicated at least one pair of student groups with different trait-like CA levels reported significant differences in their use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

Table 7

ANOVA Test Comparing the Mean NIS-S Scores of Students in All Categories Divided according to their CA Level

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	1860.218	2	930.109	8.417	.001*
Within Groups	7182.547	65	110.501		
Total	9042.765	67			

* $p \leq 0.05$

In Table 8, post hoc tests with multiple comparisons indicate that students whose CA scores were higher than 80 use nonverbal immediacy behaviors (NIS *Mean* = 88.13) less often than those whose CA scores were between 51 and 80 (NIS *Mean* = 97.38) and less often than those whose CA scores were lower than 51 (NIS *Mean* = 104.91).

Table 8

Post Hoc Tests with Multiple Comparisons

CA Level	CA Level	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
High (>80)	Moderate (51-80)	-9.248	3.162	.018*	-17.17	-1.33
	Low (<51)	-16.776	4.173	.001*	-27.23	-6.32
Moderate (51-80)	High (>80)	9.248	3.162	.018*	1.33	17.17
	Low (<51)	-7.528	3.560	.115	-16.45	1.39
Low (<51)	High (>80)	16.776	4.173	.001*	6.32	27.23
	Moderate (51-80)	7.528	3.560	.115	-1.39	16.45

* $p \leq 0.05$

Stage Four

In order to answer RQ 4, in stage four, an ANOVA test was utilized to compare NIS-S scores among students of different ages.

RQ 4: Do students' ages affect nonverbal immediacy behaviors?

For the current study, which involved 68 students from different faculties and academic levels, the results of RQ 1 and RQ 2 revealed no differences in CA and NIS-S based on students' field of study or academic level (BA vs. MA). For this RQ, one piece of demographic data, i.e., age difference, was used to investigate their NIS-S or self-reported nonverbal immediacy behaviors. Table 9 exhibits the descriptive statistics of the NIS-S mean scores categorized by the different age ranges of the students in the study, which were divided arbitrarily into three groups: (1) 18-24 years old; (2) 25-29 years old; and (3) 30-37 years old.

Table 9

NIS-S Scores and Descriptive Statistics of Students in All Categories Divided According to their Age

Age Range	n	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		NIS -Score	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
18-24	26	98.38	10.944	2.146	93.96	102.80	81	127
25-29	22	100.09	10.592	2.258	96.39	104.79	81	120
30-37	11	90.30	11.581	2.590	84.88	96.72	61	108
Total	68	96.56	11.618	1.409	93.75	99.37	61	127

As shown in Table 10, the ANOVA test revealed that at least one pair of students from different age groups varied in their use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

Table 10

ANOVA Test Comparing the Mean NIS-S Scores of Students in All Categories Divided According to their Age

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	1144.593	2	572.296	4.710	.012*
Within Groups	7898.172	65	121.510		
Total	9042.765	67			

* $p \leq 0.05$

Table 11 exhibits that post hoc tests with multiple comparisons indicated that students between 25-29 years old were found to use nonverbal immediacy behaviors ($Mean = 100.09$) more than students between 30-37 years old ($Mean = 90.03$). However, there were no significant statistical differences between students aged 18-24 and any other age group in the study.

Table 11

Post Hoc Tests with Multiple Comparisons

Age Range		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
18-24	25-29	-1.706	3.193	.867	-9.71	6.29
	30-37	8.085	3.279	.055	-.13	16.30
25-29	18-24	1.706	3.193	.867	-6.29	9.71
	30-37	9.791	3.406	.020*	-18.32	-1.26
30-37	18-24	-8.085	3.363	.061	-16.45	.28
	25-29	-9.791	3.436	.021*	-18.35	-1.23

* $p \leq .05$

Conclusion and Discussion

RQ 1: Do students across varying disciplines and academic levels experience divergent levels of fear or anxiety when they communicate using English (Communication Apprehension in L2)?

Through ANOVA analysis, the research results revealed no statistically significant differences in CA in L2 among students across varying disciplines and academic levels. The finding can be explained by the potent phenomenon of negative washback—the unintended influence of high-stake testing on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Specifically, the structural pressure exerted by national or university-level English proficiency examinations, which primarily assess receptive skills (reading and grammar), likely dictates a curriculum that is in a uniformity across all university departments and academic levels. This negative washback effect may create a pervasive institutional environment, effectively imposing a homogenizing factor on all students' classroom-based exposure. Thus, it may explain the lack of significant differentiation in CA levels found in this study.

RQ 2: Do students across varying disciplines and academic levels perceive divergent levels of their own nonverbal immediacy behaviors?

The ANOVA test revealed that students across varying disciplines and academic levels in the study were not found to be statistically different regarding the use of nonverbal behaviors to express their closeness and friendliness. This indicates no difference in the degree of using nonverbal immediacy behaviors among students in the three different disciplines and levels of education in the current study.

This finding may be attributed to the similarity among the students, as they were all enrolled in related fields of study at the same public university in Bangkok. Despite being at different academic levels (BA and MA), they share a common cultural environment, or a subculture within the broader national culture. They tend to share the same or a similar set of beliefs, values, and attitudes, which may lead them to exhibit similar nonverbal immediacy behaviors. As Ozmen (2011) noted, similar to many other aspects of communication, perceptions of nonverbal immediacy behaviors tend to be alike among individuals from the same culture.

RQ 3: Do students at different CA levels exhibit different nonverbal immediacy behaviors?

The research results revealed that students with higher levels of CA had a lower average NIS-S score. That is, they used fewer nonverbal immediacy behaviors to express their friendliness or closeness. This may be explained by the potential link between nonverbal immediacy behaviors and verbal communication. It is likely that students with higher CA are more uncomfortable using verbal immediacy behaviors, such as small talk, self-disclosing, and using examples or sharing personal experiences relevant to the lessons being learned in the EFL classroom. As Zhang (2005) suggested, individuals with high CA may avoid nonverbal immediacy behaviors owing to a perceived lack of oral communication skills, particularly in verbal interactions.

RQ 4: Do students' ages affect nonverbal immediacy behaviors?

The research results revealed that students whose age range fell between 25 to 29 years old were found to show a higher degree of nonverbal immediacy behaviors when compared to those students whose age range was between 30-37 years old, while no difference was found with students whose ages were between 18-24 years old. The observed difference—where the 25-29 age group exhibited a higher degree of nonverbal immediacy behaviors compared to the 30-37 age group—can be plausibly attributed to contrasting generational life stages and associated stress levels.

Nonverbal immediacy, which involves sustained psychological and physical presence, typically decreases when individuals experience high levels of cognitive load and stress, aligning with findings that people with high stress are likely to exhibit less nonverbal immediacy (Gardiner et al., 2019). The younger group (predominantly Gen Z: 25-29-year-olds) may thus be more worry-free, having recently entered the workforce in junior positions or transitioned from university. Conversely, the older group (Gen Y: 30-37-year-olds) is likely facing heightened structural life demands. As Fell (2023) noted, Gen Y individuals are often engaged in family formation, career advancement to positions with higher responsibility, and increased financial burdens, all of which create greater demands on their time. These demands and responsibilities may reduce the mental and physical availability necessary for expressing nonverbal immediacy.

Pedagogical Implications

Teachers of EFL courses differ from those teaching other subjects, as their role necessitates greater interpersonal communication, moving beyond lectures to engage students in activities that mirror real-life social interactions like conversations and role plays. In these highly interactive settings, unconscious bias can emerge. While nonverbal immediacy behaviors naturally convey courtesy and respect to the interlocutor (Li et al., 2016), teachers, as professionals who influence students' lives, must strive to remain neutral. The findings of this research offer crucial pedagogical insights by highlighting the relationship between CA and nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

Specifically, the research revealed that students with higher levels of CA used less nonverbal communication to express friendliness or closeness. While teachers are professionally obligated to treat all students equally, regardless of subjective factors like perceived charm or attractiveness (McCroskey et al., 1975), the more immediate professional challenge is that students with high CA are also less verbally communicative. This reduced participation, compounded by fewer nonverbal immediacy behaviors, can make it difficult for teachers to gauge students' engagement with the subject matter and the effectiveness of their pedagogy. This lack of feedback can cause teachers to feel less comfortable or confident about their teaching performance.

The key insight gained from this research is that teachers should be aware that students' limited verbal participation and reduced use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors do not necessarily indicate dissatisfaction, disrespect, or negative attitudes toward the teacher or his/her performance.

Instead, these are likely manifestations of a stable personality trait (CA). One of the best practices for teachers, in this case, is to show empathy, kindness, and understanding to all students, proactively reaching out to those who rarely use nonverbal immediacy behaviors to ensure instructional effectiveness without misinterpreting their communicative style.

Moreover, the current study looked at the concept and construct of nonverbal immediacy behaviors from a different perspective than other research studies. While the majority of studies have focused on students' perceptions of teachers' nonverbal immediacy behaviors, the present research examined students' perceptions of their own nonverbal immediacy behaviors. The findings of this research study might help clarify questions teachers often have about why students communicate with them differently through nonverbal immediacy behaviors. In addition, teachers might consider appropriate teaching strategies to help students feel more secure and reduce communication anxiety, which, in turn, tends to help improve their nonverbal immediacy behaviors. In other words, teachers might include rapport-building and warm-up class activities to reduce students' CA. At the same time, teachers could teach some basic concepts of nonverbal communication to increase awareness of the importance of communication without using words. All of these should positively affect EFL learning and teaching outcomes.

Based on the research results, especially those pertaining to the last research question, EFL teachers should view students' limited use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors not as a problem, but as a reflection of individual differences. Teachers are therefore encouraged to perform their roles with confidence, kindness, and empathy, regardless of students' responses. Furthermore, educational institutions, e.g., universities, faculties, or language institutes, can utilize the knowledge regarding CA and nonverbal immediacy behaviors to reduce individual barriers in EFL learning and to help teachers enhance EFL teaching efficiency. For instance, institutions can support students and teachers in overcoming these barriers by providing funding or incentives for teachers to find appropriate ways to reduce students' CA and boost their nonverbal immediacy behaviors, since it is clear that effective EFL teaching involves more than just linguistic factors.

To make the recommendations more concrete, these institutions can support anxious students by offering counseling, workshops, and training to reduce communication apprehension and boost communication confidence. For example, funds might be allocated for setting up special groups or clubs for doing extracurricular activities, such as an English Public Speaking Club, a Theater or Drama Club, and a Gamification Production Club, to give students opportunities to be exposed to environments that require them to

use English in an enjoyable way. By the same token, sponsorship should be offered to EFL teachers for attending specialized training sessions focused on communication skills, including counseling techniques and the interpretation of nonverbal signals.

Limitations

The current research study had the following limitations that should be considered for future research on related topics.

1. The sample size of the current study was small and included only students at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand.
2. The generalizability of the results is limited due to the restricted scope of the sample.

Recommendations For Further Research

Having identified gaps in the research, the following recommendations are made for further study.

1. The sample size should be increased by including more students at the same university or at multiple types of institutions (public, private, specialized colleges) and a more sophisticated sampling strategy (e.g., stratified sampling) should be employed to enhance the generalizability of the research results.
2. Triangulation or a mixed-methods approach is recommended (e.g., combining the current survey data with qualitative interviews or focus groups) to verify the results and gain a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons for students' self-perceived nonverbal immediacy behaviors and communicative apprehension.
3. Given the powerful potential role of negative washback in homogenizing communicative apprehension levels across disciplines, future research should empirically investigate the relationship between high-stakes testing formats and classroom oral practice. This could involve surveying instructors across different departments about their curriculum design and class activities in response to institutional English proficiency requirements.
4. To fully understand the link between CA and nonverbal immediacy behaviors, future studies should employ a multi-stakeholder approach. Specifically, research could examine teachers' perceptions of students' nonverbal immediacy behaviors and compare these to the students' self-perceptions, clarifying how the observed differences might lead to teacher misinterpretations of student engagement or motivation.

5. Longitudinal or experimental designs are recommended over cross-sectional research. Moreover, the research topics can be expanded to relevant areas of research, such as strategies to reduce CA in EFL students when using English, or the use of nonverbal interaction (NVI) to support EFL classrooms.

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Appendix A

PRCA-24 (Personal Report of Communication Apprehension)

This instrument is composed of twenty-four statements concerning feelings about communicating with others. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you: Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; are Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5

- _____1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
- _____2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
- _____3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.

- _____ 4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
- _____ 5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
- _____ 6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
- _____ 7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
- _____ 8. Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.
- _____ 9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
- _____ 10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
- _____ 11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
- _____ 12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
- _____ 13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
- _____ 14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
- _____ 15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
- _____ 16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
- _____ 17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
- _____ 18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
- _____ 19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
- _____ 20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
- _____ 21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
- _____ 22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
- _____ 23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
- _____ 24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

SCORING:

Group discussion: 18 - (scores for items 2, 4, & 6) + (scores for items 1,3, & 5)

Meetings: 18 - (scores for items 8, 9, & 12) + (scores for items 7, 10, & 11)

Interpersonal: 18 - (scores for items 14, 16, & 17) + (scores for items 13, 15, & 18)

Public Speaking: 18 - (scores for items 19, 21, & 23) + (scores for items 20, 22, & 24)

Group Discussion Score: _____

Interpersonal Score: _____

Meetings Score: _____

Public Speaking Score: _____

To obtain your total score for the PRCA, simply add your sub-scores together. _____

Scores can range from 24-120. Scores below 51 represent people who have very low CA. Scores between 51-80 represent people with average CA. Scores above 80 represent people who have high levels of trait CA.

Source: McCroskey, J. C. (2001). *An introduction to rhetorical communication*. Prentice-Hall.

Appendix B

Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report (NIS-S)

This is the most up-to-date measure of nonverbal immediacy as a self-report. Alpha reliability estimates around .90 should be expected. This measure has more face validity than previous instruments because it has more and more diverse items. Its predictive validity also is excellent. When using this instrument, it is important to recognize that the difference in these self-reports between females and males is statistically significant and socially significant (that is, substantial variance in the scores on this instrument can be attributed to biological sex). Whether these differences are "real" (that is, females may actually be more nonverbally immediate than males) or a function of social desirability (that is, females think they should be more immediate than males think they should be) or a function of actual behavior has not yet been determined (as of September, 2003).

DIRECTIONS: The following statements describe the ways some people behave while talking with or to others. Please indicate in the space at the left of each item the degree to which you believe the statement applies TO YOU. Please use the following 5-point scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Occasionally; 4 = Often; 5 = Very Often

- _____ 1. I use my hands and arms to gesture while talking to people.
- _____ 2. I touch others on the shoulder or arm while talking to them.
- _____ 3. I use a monotone or dull voice while talking to people.
- _____ 4. I look over or away from others while talking to them.
- _____ 5. I move away from others when they touch me while we are talking.
- _____ 6. I have a relaxed body position when I talk to people.
- _____ 7. I frown while talking to people.
- _____ 8. I avoid eye contact while talking to people.

- _____ 9. I have a tense body position while talking to people.
- _____ 10. I sit close or stand close to people while talking with them.
- _____ 11. My voice is monotonous or dull when I talk to people.
- _____ 12. I use a variety of vocal expressions when I talk to people.
- _____ 13. I gesture when I talk to people.
- _____ 14. I am animated when I talk to people.
- _____ 15. I have a bland facial expression when I talk to people.
- _____ 16. I move closer to people when I talk to them.
- _____ 17. I look directly at people while talking to them.
- _____ 18. I am stiff when I talk to people.
- _____ 19. I have a lot of vocal variety when I talk to people.
- _____ 20. I avoid gesturing while I am talking to people.
- _____ 21. I lean toward people when I talk to them.
- _____ 22. I maintain eye contact with people when I talk to them.
- _____ 23. I try not to sit or stand close to people when I talk with them.
- _____ 24. I lean away from people when I talk to them.
- _____ 25. I smile when I talk to people.
- _____ 26. I avoid touching people when I talk to them.

SCORING:

Step 1. Add the scores from the following items: 1, 2, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, and 25.

Step 2. Add the scores from the following items: 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 18, 20, 23, 24, and 26.

Total Score = 78 plus Step 1 minus Step 2.

Norms:

Females	Mean = 102.0	S.D. = 10.9	High = >112	Low = <92
Males	Mean = 93.8	S.D. = 10.8	High = >104	Low = <83

Source: Richmond, V. P., McCroskey, J. C., & Johnson, A. D. (2003).

Development of the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale (NIS): Measures of self- and other-perceived nonverbal immediacy. *Communication Quarterly*, 51, 502-515