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## The Relationship of Teacher's Immediacy to Student Motivation and Student Learning: A Literature Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

*This article presented a literature review of research done on a construct that has been widely studied overseas but not yet done in Malaysia, that is, 'teacher's immediacy'. The focus of analysis is research on the relationship of teacher's immediacy to student motivation and student learning. Conclusions drawn from the research shows that teacher's immediacy is good for teachers, students and the teaching process. Method found to be most commonly used in measuring teacher's immediacy is student report. Finally this paper discusse the implications of the findings on the field of research and education in Malaysia.*

### ABSTRAK

*Artikel ini memaparkan tinjauan literatur yang dilakukan ke atas satu bentuk konstruk yang telah banyak dikaji di luar negara tetapi belum dilakukan di Malaysia, iaitu 'tingkahlaku kesediaan guru'. Analisis ini memberi fokus kepada kajian-kajian berkenaan hubungan di antara kesediaan guru dan motivasi pelajar serta pembelajaran pelajar. Kesimpulan daripada dapatan kajian-kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa kesediaan guru baik untuk guru, pelajar dan proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Kaedah yang sering digunakan dalam memeriksa kesediaan guru ialah laporan pelajar. Akhirnya, artikel ini membincangkan implikasi dapatan kajian-kajian ini ke atas bidang penyelidikan dan pendidikan di Malaysia.*

### INTRODUCTION

One common question which teachers continue to ask is "how do we motivate students to learn?". Student motivation has continually become a major concern for teachers, novice or experienced, because student motivation is critical for classroom learning and at the same time influences teachers' difficulty and satisfaction in their jobs. With some experience, teachers usually come to grips with classroom management, but they continue to 'wrestle' with motivational problems among students.



The struggle is especially felt by teachers in classes where students have lower academic achievement and higher discipline problems. It is the advocacy of this article to suggest the idea that even with these kind of classes, they can do much to capture student's interest and maintain the student's motivation if the teachers build 'suitable' characteristics. The importance of teacher's characteristics perhaps can be best described by Ginot's statement in his classic *Teacher and Child* (Ginot 1972):

I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my daily personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or de-humanized. p. 13.

According to Ginot, even though many learning problems would be solved in the coming years as technology improves, but one function will always remain with the teacher; that is to create the emotional climate for learning. In light of the importance of teacher's shaping their characteristics to suit their motivator role for all kinds of students, this article presents a research carried out on 'immediacy', a concept which describes teacher's positive characteristics and its relationship to student's perception. Finally this article outlines some suggestions for practitioners and researchers in Malaysia to pay more attention to this concept, since there has been a dearth of research on this particular subject in the country.

#### TEACHER'S IMMEDIACY

Immediacy is a concept introduced by Mehrabian (1971), a social psychologist, to explain communication variables; verbal and non-verbal behaviors that occur during interpersonal or group communication. Immediacy behaviors create physical and psychological closeness among people who employ it in their communication. Andersen (1979) introduced this concept into instructional communication. Thus, the 'immediacy' concept can be used to describe positive teacher's characteristics. Teacher's immediacy means teacher's verbal and non-verbal behaviors, which occur during student-teacher interaction that would create physical and psychological closeness between teachers and students. According to Mehrabian (1971), non-verbal immediacy behavior includes smiling, leaning forward, vocal variety and relaxed body position. On the other hand, verbal immediacy behavior includes the use of verb tense (focusing on the behavior, not on characteristics or personality), inclusiveness (I, vs. We), addressing people by name, using humor in communication and ownership or responsibility.



Teacher's immediacy has been a popular subject matter in the education field in western world for the last 20 years and continue to be the focus even in the 1990s. For example, in 1990, the *Communication Education Journal* publishes a special volume which consists of a wide variety of research on teacher's immediacy and it's relationship to various instructional variables and psychological constructs. Most research shows that teacher's immediacy do have an impact on student's motivation and students learning.

Based on Mehrabian's descriptions of teacher's immediacy behavior, a number of researchers have taken the initiative to build instruments, which measure this concept. Research of teacher's immediacy today are mostly based on a 15 item generalized immediacy scale developed by Andersen (1979) named Behavior Indicant of Immediacy Scale (BII) with some or no modifications. Andersen (1979) develops and uses BII scale in his doctoral dissertation in 1978 on the topic of "The relationship between teacher's immediacy and teaching effectiveness". Andersen (1979) uses Gestalt approach which defines immediacy construct conceptually to students before measuring the student's perception of their teacher's level of immediacy. Later researchers such as Richmond, Gorham, and McCrosky (1987) develop a 14 item Likert-type Non-Verbal Immediacy Behavior Scale (NIB) while Gorham (1988) develops a 17 item Likert-type Verbal Immediacy Behavior Scale (VIB).

NIB and VIB scales can access teacher's physical and psychological closeness through student's perceptions to or through teacher's self-rating of teacher's immediacy behaviors. The Likert-type scale range from rarely (1) to very often (4) has been used in NIB and VIB. Most researchers prefer using student's perception of teacher's immediacy rather than using teacher's self-rating approach to access teacher's immediacy behaviors. This is because teacher's report on their own behavior is believed to be less accurate particularly on the aspect of their non-verbal behaviors (Gorham & Zakahi 1990).

T. Subahan (1990) in his effort to develop a questionnaire of teaching behaviors of teachers also suggested researchers use student's perceptions approach in evaluating teacher's effectiveness behaviors. According to Subahan (1990), this method is more reliable because students 'perception of teacher's behaviors can determine student's behaviors (motivation, emotions, perception, attitude, values, beliefs and norms) toward other learning factors in school.

Frymier (1994) use the social-style variable to measure characteristics of subjects in determining the face validity of verbal immediacy behavior (VIB) and non-verbal immediacy behavior (NIB). Frymier (1994) find that there is constant relationship between teacher's immediacy behaviors to student cognitive learning where some shows positive relationship and some do not.

Previous research on verbal immediacy behavior show that it has a high construct validity by showing positive relationship with other scales such as students motivation and student learning. Reliability for verbal immediacy behavior is high ranging from .83 to .89 (Rubin, Palmgreen & Sypher 1994).



Non-verbal immediacy behavior also consists of high construct validity. Palmgreen et al. (1994) note that non-verbal immediacy behaviors has value reliability range from .73 to .89

Zuria and Salleh (1998) suggest therapeutic interaction for improving student-teacher relationship, and for helping teachers cope with problematic classrooms (Zuria & Salleh 2002). The model focuses on teacher's verbal and non-verbal communication scale. This model is a combination of counselling skills and Mehrabian's immediacy behavior.

### STUDENT MOTIVATION AND TEACHER'S IMMEDIACY

Motivation is defined as the process that initiates, directs and sustains behavior to satisfy physiological and psychological needs (Arkes 1981). Needs for achievement, affection and affiliation are examples of psychological needs that believed to associate with achievement motivation. Wood and Wood (1999) define achievement motivation as the need to accomplish something difficult and to perform a high standard of excellence. In instructional communication research, teacher's immediacy behavior have been studied in terms of how it influences student motivation to study.

Keller (1983) divides motivation into two categories: trait motivation and state motivation. Trait motivation is general motivation and stable across a particular time regardless of situational factors. In term of student situation, student trait motivation is more enduring and refers to student's general motivation toward learning, not a particular course or content subject. State motivation on the other hand is not stable because it is significantly influenced by situational factors. In the case of students, state motivation refers to the motivation experiences toward a particular course and change over time, especially depending on the student's perceptions and attitudes toward teachers who teach the subject and toward other situational factors.

Motivation influences what, which and how we learn (Schunk 2002). Schunk stated that motivation ensures a continuous relationship between learning and achievement. At the same time, the previous motivation level also influences the coming motivation. Pintrich and Schunk (2002) mentioned that motivation influences learning of new lessons, mastering of skills, strategies and behaviors which have been learned before.

Psychologists have focused on five basic questions about motivation (Graham & Weiner 1996). First, why do people choose to do the things they do? ( eg. why do some students choose to study instead of watching television?) Second, after they decided, when do they start doing it?. Third, what is the level of their involvement in the chosen activity. Fourth, what makes some students stay focused while others stray away?, and finally, what are their thoughts and feelings while doing the activity?. Some answers that relate to this question

was provided by Woolfolk (2004). According to Woolfolk, the kind of homework given by a teacher influences the student's motivation to learn the a subject. When assignments given to a student which are connected to their interest, strike their curiosity, or connected with real life situations, the students feel more motivated to learn. Other elements that shape student motivation to learn includes planning, focus on goal, metacognitive awareness of what is to be learning and how to learn, active search for new information, clear perception of response, pride and satisfaction of achievements and high level of need for learning (Johnson & Johnson 1999).

Thorkildsen, Nolen and Fournier (1994), in their interview with students found that students have different perception of motivation. The first group stated that meaningful learning and certain strategies motivate the desire to understand. The second group viewed learning as a responsibility, which required efforts. The third group gave priority to extrinsic motivations in achieving.

Most of the previous researches in measuring students motivation-teacher's immediacy relationship use trait and state motivation scale consisting of a list of 12 items bi-polar adjectives designed and developed by Christophel (1990). Trait motivation scale is used to access general student motivation prior to the semester. State motivation scale asks students how they feel about taking a specific course or subject. Christophel (1990) notes that this scale has validity ranging from .91 to .96.

Christophel (1990) administered a research on 562 college students from nine colleges to determine the relationship between student's state motivation and teacher immediacy. This investigation demonstrated that teacher's immediacy behaviors have a positive relationship with student motivation. Christophel (1990) concluded that

A portion of teacher immediacy behavior must first modify student's state motivation prior to immediacy becoming an effective predictor of learning (p. 335).

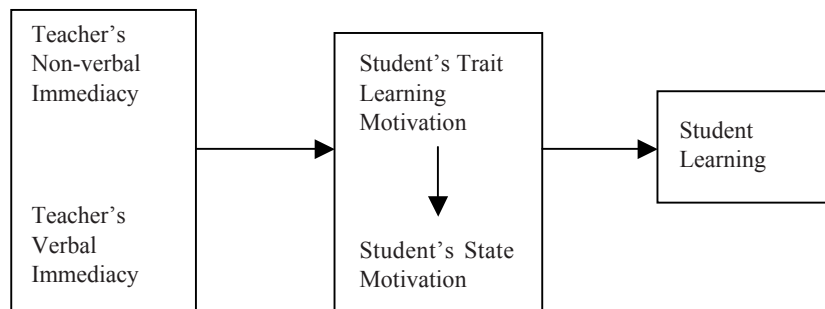


FIGURE 1. Model of teacher's immediacy and motivation

This finding supports the theory of motivation in student learning as proposed by Keller (1983).

Frymier (1993a) through her research on 178 undergraduate communication students find a positive relationship between teacher's immediacy and student's state of motivation. She notes that even though among the high trait motivation students (beginning motivation), non-verbal and verbal teacher's immediacy still have positive impact on student's state motivation. This finding supports the proposal that teacher's immediacy behaviors impact student's state motivation regardless of student's trait motivation to study.

Another research by Frymier (1993b), who investigated low, moderate, and high apprehension students also find that teacher's immediacy behaviors are associated with high levels of state motivation for all levels of Communication Apprehension (CA) students. This research finds that immediate teacher could help high CA students to increase their state motivation to the same level of state motivation of low CA students. Her research shows that high CA students demonstrate low level in CA after being taught by high immediate teacher.

Christophel and Gorham (1995) administered a test-retest analysis study on 319 college students to find out student perceived sources of motivation and demotivation in college classes. Findings showed that students perceive teacher negative behaviors as the source of students demotivation to study, and student's perceived their high state motivation as central of personality owned state (trait motivation) and is less impacted by teacher's immediacy behavior.

A study on college student's motivation and the practice of ethical behaviors among lecturers was conducted by Mohammad, Zuria and Thantawi (2002). Results of the study showed a correlation between lecturer's practice of ethical behavior and student's motivation to learn. Students stated better perceptions towards lecturers who practiced ethical behavior compared to those who do not. Not only at college level, students at the secondary school level also have different perceptions towards their teachers depending on the teacher's behaviors. Romaizom's (2002) study showed that students are motivated by teachers who show positive teaching behaviors as compared to negative teaching behaviors. The same results were also reported by Rosnani (2002) in her studies of immediacy and motivation among form five students. Rosnani found correlation between teacher's immediacy and student's motivation and correlation between teacher's immediacy and student's feeling towards course content, classroom and homework.

## STUDENT LEARNING AND TEACHER IMMEDIACY

Learning is the process-product of teacher instructional behaviors in classroom (Gorham 1988). Learning can be divided into three categories: cognitive,



affective and behavioral. Affective learning is student's perception of their attitude toward course content, teacher's and expected behaviors. Cognitive learning on the other hand, is student's perception of their own learning on a particular course in terms of the ability to recall what they have learned or in comparing to learning in other courses (Gorham & Zakahi 1990). Finally, behavioral learning (behavior commitment) refers to the effect of teacher's immediacy on the perceived future behaviors in enrolling in courses with related content or willingness to practice what they have learned in other related classes or in everyday life (Andersen 1979).

In measuring student's affective learning, most researchers use 25 items with 6 component bi-polar scale developed by Gorham (1988). This scale is to get student's response toward course content, instructor and behavioral attention. Previous research shows that this scale has reliability ranging from .86 to .98 (Christophel 1990). Student's cognitive learning on the other hand, use 2 item 'learning lost' scale developed by Richmond et al. (1987). Gorham (1988) in her research notes that this scale has .94 reliability. Finally, in measuring student's behavior learning, most previous researchers use Behavior Commitment scale developed by Andersen (1979). This scale is used to measure student's future behaviors. Andersen (1979) in his research reports that this scale has reliability at .94.

Numerous research have been conducted to examine the relationship between teacher's immediacy and its impact on student learning. Gorham (1988), Christophel (1990) and Frymier (1993) conduct a straight-forward research to examine teacher's immediacy – student learning relationship. Overall, these studies report a positive relationship of summed teacher immediacy to student learning. Christophel (1990) reports that verbal immediacy behaviors reveal a slightly higher correlation with affective learning, and non-verbal immediacy have a higher correlation with cognitive and behavioral learning. Gorham's (1988) research reports a similar finding where nonverbal immediacy has a greater impact on learning compared to its verbal counterpart.

Pioneer research in teacher's immediacy and student learning by Andersen (1979) shows that teacher's immediacy have a positive relationship with affective learning but not with cognitive and behavior learning. Later researchers (see for example Frymier 1994; Christophel 1990) note that the phenomenal relationship in Andersen's (1979) research occurs due to the lack of operational definition of cognitive and behavioral learning. Modification in operational definition on cognitive and behavioral learning (Frymier 1994; Christophel 1990) in later research reveals a positive relationship of teacher immediacy behavior to all of student learning dimension; affective, cognitive and behavior. Based on the previous research on teacher's immediacy-students learning relationship, Frymier (1994) developed a learning model (Figure 2).

Figure 2 shows that learning starts with the student's own trait motivation, that means most students are born with the nature to learn. However, how much

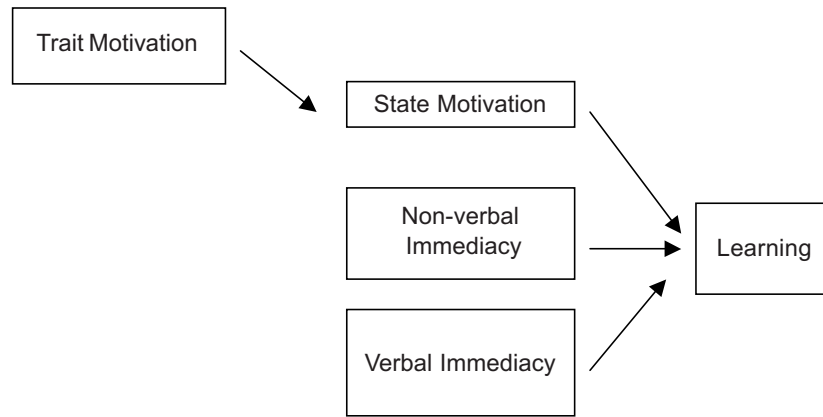


FIGURE 2. The learning model of teacher immediacy

a student learn depends on the state motivation which is determined by the teacher's immediacy behavior. In other words, this model explains that even though students have trait motivation, their motivation to learn a particular subject depends on the behaviors portrayed by the teacher teaching the subject.

Sanders and Wiseman (1990) conduct a research to examine the teacher's immediacy behaviors-student learning relationship on multicultural population students. They find that summed teacher's immediacy behaviors have a positive relationship to student affective, cognitive and behavioral learning in all multicultural population; Whites, Asians, Hispanics and Black with no significant differences.

Humor is considered a verbal and non-verbal immediacy behavior. Research by Gorham and Christophel (1990) report that student's perceived teacher's using humor in classroom has a high relationship with student learning. This study also indicates that female and male students perceive humor differently. Female students relate teacher humor with personal stories related to classroom topic and male students value teacher humor through teacher's behaviors which show senses of humor.

Comparing teacher's self rated immediacy and student perceived teacher's immediacy, Gorham and Zakahi (1990) report that there is a high agreement on the positive relationship of teacher's immediacy and student learning between research with these source of teacher's immediacy. This finding also shows that teachers are highly aware of their use of immediacy behaviors. This information on the relationship of immediacy behaviors to desired learning outcomes is very useful for teachers to practice in their classroom.



## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Results of the research discussed concluded that:

- Teacher's immediacy behaviors have a positive correlation with student motivation.
- Teacher's immediacy behaviors impact student's state motivation regardless of students' trait motivation.
- Students perceive teacher's negative behaviors as the source of student's demotivation to study.
- Student's commitment of enrolling into future courses with related content or to practice what they have learned in certain courses is effected by teacher's immediacy.
- Teacher's non-verbal immediacy has a greater impact on learning compared to it's verbal counterpart.
- Teacher's immediacy has positive relationship to student learning in all multicultural population: Whites, Asians, Hispanics and Blacks with no significant difference.
- Female students appreciate teacher's humor of personal experience while males appreciate teacher's behaviors which show senses of humor.

## IMPLICATIONS ON THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Research carried out on teacher's immediacy have focused on various settings such as in university and colleges, high school, junior high school and involving multicultural population. These successful research have produced variety of valuable findings in instructional communication field. As a result, various immediacy behaviors have been suggested to teachers to help them be immediate in the classroom (Frymier 1994). Some teachers in Malaysia have practiced using immediacy behaviors while some have not realized the significance of the relationship between these behavior and student's motivation to learn. Thus it becomes the advocacy of the authors to encourage teachers in Malaysia to adapt these behavior in their teaching.

Teacher educators can help future teachers build immediacy behaviors through course work and practice. Classes such as educational psychology should discuss immediacy as a topic. During micro teaching exercises, lecturers can prepare evaluation forms that include the display of immediacy behaviors as an indicator of positive teaching skills. This way student teachers are guided to practice their immediacy behaviors under the supervision of experienced educators.

Teacher's immediacy concept has not received the same kind of attention in Malaysian educational research that it has received elsewhere. This is an area deem worthy of study by education experts in this country. Perhaps the

findings of future studies in Malaysia using this concept may be able to answer the common question teachers keep asking; “how do I motivate my students?”

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