

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHING AS THE FEEDBACK IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

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Abstract. *Since it relies on verbal and non-verbal communication, the teaching process is significantly determined by their characteristics and quality. Although these two types of communication are intertwined in the classroom and their roles are dialectically connected, non-verbal communication and some of its signs are often unjustifiably considered less important. Therefore, this paper will focus on facial expressions as one of the most significant types of non-verbal signs used in teaching. The goal of this paper is to determine teachers' perceptions of the importance of facial expressions and the type of feedback that it most often helps to obtain during the teaching process. The research sample consists of 107 primary school teachers from the territory of the Nis' School Administration. The results of this research show that teachers recognize the role of facial expressions in teaching and that the feedback they most often receive through facial expressions is related to the students' feelings and their cognitive activities. Moreover, it was found that the students' age, that is, the level of schooling, significantly determines the diversity of their perceptions on this issue.*

Key words: *facial expressions, primary school, teaching, feedback, communication*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the continuous and good-quality feedback is the prerequisite of successful interaction in teaching, in order to ensure the proper quality of interaction, it is important to recognize and respect the feedback, regardless of whether it is verbal or non-verbal in nature. The process of encoding, sending, receiving, decoding, processing and responding to the information in the process of teaching is a complex process where both verbal and non-verbal cues play an equally important role. Since the non-verbal communication takes place using non-verbal signs whose recognition and interpretation requires more attention and effort, it is often given less attention than verbal communication. On the other hand, if

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we know that non-verbal communication can complement verbal communication, replace words, express emotions, indicate status relations and regulate interaction (Brilhart et al.), it is clear that this phenomenon of neglecting the significance of non-verbal signs and non-verbal communication in the process of teaching is completely unjustified.

Nonverbal communication is defined as the “process of signalling meaning through interpersonal behaviour that does not involve spoken words” (Goss & O’Hair, 1988), and it allows us to learn more about the interlocutor and reliably discover some information related to his/her intentions, feelings, cognition or the flow of thought.

Non-verbal communication takes place through non-verbal signs which can be paralinguistic and extralinguistic non-verbal signs. While paralinguistic signs include certain vocalization elements that are not included in the phonology of speech, such as, the voices and noises that are not parts of words and also the way they are pronounced, on the other hand, extralinguistic signs do not have a vocalizing character and include kinesics and proxemics.

“Kinesics is based on body movements that serve as signs, that is, voluntary and involuntary arm, hand, finger, head and face movements (especially eyes and lips), as well as leg movements and the movements of the whole body which send a certain message. People use the language of body movements to communicate their conscious and subconscious intentions, emotions, attitudes and motives“ (Žikić and Trebješanin, 2015, pp. 62-63). On the other hand, proxemics is based on distance and spatial relations between the participants in communication.

As we can see, non-verbal communication is an important aspect of the communication process. Therefore, the interaction between teachers and students, that is, non-verbal communication plays an important role in the teaching process. Conscious and controlled use of non-verbal signs in the classroom can make communication and interaction more successful. The teacher should learn how to master the skill of using non-verbal communication. Moreover, the teacher should help the students understand and control their nonverbal cues in order for their interaction to be successful.

Facial expression is a type of non-verbal signs that is seen as a specific and very important form of feedback in the classroom, and by its character belongs to the group of kinesic signs. Given its role and importance in teaching, the focus of this paper is precisely on studying the peculiarities of feedback received in the classroom in the form of facial expression.

2. FACIAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Facial expressions as nonverbal signs have a significant role in gathering information and tracking cognition, emotions, or attitudes. It implies facial expressions, that is, the movements or positions of facial muscles which can provide significant feedback on the emotional status, as well as the cognitive and conative processes of the participants in the communication process. According to Lierheimer and Stichter (2012, p. 23), the types of facial expression that are particularly important in the interaction process are: eyes, eyebrows, mouth, forehead and head tilt. The lips and the area around the lips are seen as very important elements of facial expression. Different positions of the lips clearly indicate many different emotions such as joy, sadness, happiness, indifference, etc., which directly affect the intensity and quality of interaction in the teaching process (Suzić, 2005). The ability to recognize facial expressions and the message conveyed is a key prerequisite for successful communication (Averett, 2009, p. 31) because it allows interactive subjects to

provide both audio and animation feedback (Lin, 2012). Facial expressions allow us to learn a lot about the person we are communicating with because it usually includes spontaneous reactions of individuals. Since facial expressions relate to those situations when a person shows emotions unintentionally (Kostić, 1995, p. 102), spontaneous facial expressions can therefore often reveal more than the verbal expressions themselves (Ekman, 1993, pp. 385-386). Facial expressions are mostly associated with special emotions. Whether a person will recognize and understand the facial expressions depends on the culture. In some cultures, showing emotions is a sign of weakness, therefore people try to suppress them as much as possible, and put more effort into hiding their facial expression (Ekman & Friesen, 1971).

The eyes are the most pronounced and dominant part of the face, because they are the most effective when it comes to expressing love, hate, anger or guilt (Todorović, 2010). Momentary expressions that signal emotions include muscle movements such as raising the eyebrows, wrinkling the forehead, rolling the eyes or curling the lip (Jonathan & Sathik, 2013). In most people, facial expressions are a visible preview of invisible mental and psychological processes such as pain, concentration or joy. Most people can control their facial expressions only in specific situations that are planned and practiced in advance (Norbury, 1997).

Non-verbal communication and facial expressions in the teaching process are very important because the teacher and students constantly communicate. Facial expressions have a significant role in the process of interaction between teachers and students. The impact due to communication of the face is so powerful in interaction, because faces are rich in information about individual identity, and also about mood and mental state, being accessible windows into the mechanisms governing our emotions (Jonathan & Sathik, 2013).

In the teaching process, facial expressions are the primary source of information in determining the inner feelings of an individual. All people use facial expressions to form certain perception of others. Teachers' facial expressions keep students motivated and interested. Students' facial expressions allow the teacher to receive adequate feedback on the psychological mobility of students, their level of understanding, the pace of progress and possible obstacles in communication. Therefore, the main strategy for behaviour optimization in teaching is for teachers to develop the ability to recognize certain facial expressions and to use the feedback they receive in this way to carry out and improve the teaching process. To be a good receiver of student messages, a lecturer must be familiar to many of the subtle nonverbal cues that their students send (Jonathan & Sathik, 2013).

An important element of successful interaction in the classroom is the knowledge of students' physiognomy and facial features since these have significant informative value in understanding the temperament and personality traits of students. Therefore, when students are feeling uncomfortable, they may have lowered brow, drawn together brow, horizontal or vertical forehead wrinkles, and have a hard time in maintaining eye contact (Jonathan & Sathik, 2013).

Moreover, the two-way use of facial expressions in the classroom is one of the prerequisites for the successful teaching process. Therefore, the teacher must be able to teach students how to communicate using facial expressions. When introducing the students with this topic, one should start by instructing them about the seven universal facial expressions, as well as by teaching them how to understand and recognize facial expressions (Lierheimer & Stichter, 2012, p. 21).

Eye contact between teachers and students is very important. By observing the students, the teacher is able to align the communication, that is, to determine whether the students are listening to him/her and whether they have understood the lecture. The focus of the gaze

also reveals the subconscious attitude or affection of a person. Teachers look more attentively at those students who listen to the lecture more carefully. Maintaining or avoiding eye contact with the teacher has a distinct informative value in terms of evaluating student attention and concentration on the lecture and communication that is required by the lecturer, but also the degree of mastery of knowledge and skills that are assessed by the teacher. In addition to attention and understanding, the elements of cognition which facial expressions provide the adequate feedback on are also the following: perception, concentration, reasoning, inference, recognition, etc.

As we can see, facial expressions represent a significant feedback in the communication process in the classroom. It provides significant feedback with regard to emotions (joy, satisfaction, happiness, fear, anxiety, and insecurity), cognition (attention, understanding, concentration, perception, reasoning, inference) and connotation (motivation, will, interests, desires). For this reason, we started the empirical study of facial expressions in primary school teaching as feedback in the communication process.

3. METHODOLOGY

Since the teaching process is a specific communication process whose goal is the systematic accomplishment of the predefined educational goals and objectives, the significant determinant of its quality and efficiency is precisely the quality of communication that takes place in the classroom. As verbal communication is given more attention in the process of teaching, this paper focuses on researching the peculiarities and roles of one of the extralinguistic signs of nonverbal communication. The goal of this paper is to examine the role of facial expressions in the teaching process and the character or type of feedback that we receive in the classroom through these non-verbal signs. The operationalization of the set goal was performed through the following tasks: (1) Determine whether the teachers recognize the importance of facial expressions in teaching; (2) Determine what kind of feedback teachers receive through facial expressions of students. Based on the tasks set, the hypotheses in this research are as follows: teachers recognize the role of facial expressions in the teaching process; facial expressions most often provide feedback related to students' emotions. The research sample included a total of 107 primary school teachers from the territory of the School Administration of Niš. The sample structure in relation to the variables analysed in the research is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The sample structure

Education level	N	%
Subject teacher	75	70,10%
Class teacher	32	29,90%
Total	107	100,00%
Years of service		
Up to 10 yrs	40	37,40%
From 10 to 20 yrs	43	40,20%
Over 20 yrs	24	22,40%
Total	107	100,00%

As we can see from the sample details presented in Table 1, 70.10% of the study participants are subject teachers, while the sample structure is more uniform in relation to the years of service, especially in the categories - up to 10 years (37.40%) and from 10 to 20 years (40.20%).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Facial expressions are seen as significant feedback in the process of classroom communication. It provides significant feedback with regard to emotions (joy, satisfaction, happiness, fear, anxiety, and insecurity), cognition (attention, understanding, concentration, perception, reasoning, inference) and connotation (motivation, will, interests, desires). For this reason, we started the empirical study of facial expressions in primary school teaching as feedback in the communication process.

Table 2 Teachers' attitudes about the type of feedback obtained through facial expressions

Facial expressions give me feedback on:	N	I absolutely disagree	I disagree	I partially agree	I agree	I absolutely agree	AS	SD
Student understanding	10 7	4 3,7%	2 1,9%	28 26,2%	46 43%	27 25,2%	3,84	0,95
Student attentiveness	10 7	/ /	1 0,9%	27 25,2%	54 50,5%	25 23,4%	3,96	0,72
Student reasoning	10 7	/ /	14 13,1%	31 29%	38 35,5%	24 22,4%	3,67	0,96
Student concentration	10 7	2 1,9%	12 11,2%	26 24,3%	47 43,9%	20 18,7%	3,66	0,97
Student fear and anxiety	10 7	1 0,9%	9 8,4%	25 23,4%	46 43%	28 24,3%	3,81	0,93
Student will and desire	10 7	16 17,8%	24 22,4%	26 24,3%	22 20,6%	16 15%	2,92	1,32
Student motivation and interests	10 7	5 4,7%	10 9,3%	25 23,4%	50 46,7%	17 15,9%	3,58	1,01
Student satisfaction and joy	10 7	4 3,7%	23 21,5%	13 12,1%	43 40,2%	24 22,4%	3,56	1,16
Student insecurities	10 7	10 9,3%	13 12,1%	15 14%	33 30,8%	36 33,6%	3,67	1,30

Table 2 shows the attitudes of teachers about the type of feedback they receive in class through the facial expressions of students. We have observed very positive attitudes of teachers regarding the role and importance of facial expressions as a source of feedback in teaching, because all of their statements indicated either positive or absolutely positive attitude of teachers. From the individual point of view, teachers believe that facial expressions mostly provide feedback on students' attention - only one of them (0.9%) disagreed with this statement. As many as 73.9% of the study participants chose one of the two levels of absolute agreement on this issue.

Teachers also have a very positive attitude towards facial expressions as the feedback on students' understanding of the lecture, which is confirmed by only 5.6% of negative

attitudes (3.7% and 1.9%) and 68.2% of positive answers (43% agree and 25.2% absolutely agree). Teachers have a similar opinion regarding the information about student insecurity that they receive through their facial expressions, because a total of 64.4% of them confirm its significant informative value.

Student facial expressions in classroom are a significant feedback regarding student satisfaction and joy (62.4% of positive attitudes) and student motivation and interest (62.6% of positive attitudes). Teachers often receive feedback about students' fear or anxiety, but also their concentration through their facial expressions (a total of 67.3% and 62.6% of positive attitudes, respectively). Students' facial expressions have a slightly lower informative value with regard to providing the teachers with information about students' reasoning (57.9%).

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that facial expressions are not, in teachers' opinions, the most optimum feedback on students' will and desire. Teachers had a divided opinion on this type of feedback. While 40.2% of teachers showed some degree of negative attitude, 35.6% of them confirmed that facial expressions are a significant feedback in the classroom. It is important to emphasize that 24.3% of teachers only partially agree with the statement about the possibilities of facial expressions to provide the information about students' will and desire. If, on the other hand, we take into account that over 40% of teachers absolutely deny the informative value of facial expressions in providing them with information about students' will and desire it could be concluded that the causes of this phenomenon should be observed from two different perspectives. The first possibility might relate to the fact that teachers pay little attention to students' will and desire about the communication in the classroom, or that perhaps students are not ready to manifest and express their views on it due to possible teacher disinterest or for fear of them expressing a different opinion.

From the aspect of the analysis of the results obtained, it is important to emphasize that in as many as seven out of nine statements, the teachers were fairly neutral (they partially agree in the range from 23.4% to 29%). These results lead us to the conclusion that in about a quarter of classroom situations, teachers are unsure that they were able to recognize the information that students provide through facial expressions. The reason for this might be linked to the specific teaching contexts, but also to the individuality of students, which does not allow teachers to always conclude or generalize feedback based on students' facial expressions. However, as this opinion does not have a negative connotation, it can be concluded that predominantly positive impressions about the informative value of students' facial expressions in eight of the nine analyzed fields confirm the positive attitude of teachers about the importance and role facial expressions play in providing good feedback.

If we compare the results obtained with the initial hypothesis, it can be noticed that it is only partially confirmed because, apart from the importance of facial expressions for providing feedback on students' emotions, the teachers emphasize that it is even more important from the aspect of cognition. From the aspect of connotation, the facial expressions have somewhat less importance because teachers find it most difficult to recognize students' will and desire through facial expressions.

As we can see in Table 3, based on the t-test results, at the level of $p < 0.05$, there was a statistically significant difference in the attitudes between the subject teachers and class teachers with regard to the students' facial expressions and the information they provide about student satisfaction, joy, as well as their insecurities. The determined statistically significant difference is a consequence of the more frequent emphasis on the informative

value of facial expressions in the mentioned areas by class teachers. If we know that they teach the youngest students, the results obtained can be attributed to the fact that this is the very beginning of schooling, which is very emotional for children, but also to a degree of children's inexperience to hide and not express emotions. Honesty in facial expressions is a characteristic of the youngest age, therefore the results obtained are in accordance with the specifics of this developmental period.

Table 3 Teachers' attitudes about the type of feedback obtained through facial expressions with regard to the cycle of schooling in which they teach

Facial expressions give me feedback on	Teachers	AS	SD	t-test	df	p
Student understanding	Class teacher	3,89	0,89	0,866	105	0,388
	Subject teacher	3,71	1,08			
Student attentiveness	Class teacher	4,05	0,73	2,007	105	0,047
	Subject teacher	3,75	0,67			
Student reasoning	Class teacher	3,78	0,96	1,881	105	0,063
	Subject teacher	3,4	0,94			
Student concentration	Class teacher	3,77	0,9	1,810	105	0,073
	Subject teacher	3,4	1,07			
Student fear and anxiety	Class teacher	3,86	0,92	0,909	105	0,366
	Subject teacher	3,68	0,96			
Student will and desire	Class teacher	3,14	1,27	2,731	105	0,007
	Subject teacher	2,4	1,31			
Student motivation and interests	Class teacher	3,78	0,9	3,047	105	0,003
	Subject teacher	3,15	1,13			
Student satisfaction and joy	Class teacher	3,97	0,91	6,097	105	0,000*
	Subject teacher	2,59	1,13			
Student insecurities	Class teacher	4,18	0,94	6,891	105	0,000*
	Subject teacher	2,46	1,26			

Based on the F-test results, a difference was found in the attitudes of teachers at the level of statistical significance $p < 0.05$ in the last two items. In both cases, the statistically significant difference occurs as a consequence of the fact the student insecurity, satisfaction and joy were more frequently recognized by the teachers with the least work experience. On the other hand, the teachers with more than 20 years of service were the least able to identify through facial expression students' insecurity (AS = 3.29 versus 3.46, or 4.12) and satisfaction and joy (AS = 3.29 versus at 3.3 and 4, respectively). This statistically significant difference which was found can be partially linked to the fact that in the initial years at work, teachers react more emotionally which makes it easier to them to recognize the emotional impulses of students. The results obtained on the influence of teachers' years of service on their use of information capacities of facial expressions in relation to emotions are very important. They are seen as important because teaching is an educational process where emotional components are extremely important, and the improvement of the current state is a prerequisite for its quality assurance.

Table 4 Teachers' attitudes about the type of feedback obtained through facial expressions with regard to the teachers' years of service

Facial expressions give me feedback on:	N	Years of service	AS	SD	F-test	p
Student understanding	107	Up to 10 yrs	3,85	0,69	0,003	0,997
		From 10 to 20 yrs	3,83	0,97		
		Over 20 yrs	3,83	1,27		
Student attentiveness	107	Up to 10 yrs	4,02	0,76	0,868	0,423
		From 10 to 20 yrs	4	0,65		
		Over 20 yrs	3,79	0,77		
Student reasoning	107	Up to 10 yrs	3,9	0,84	2,663	0,074
		From 10 to 20 yrs	3,65	0,94		
		Over 20 yrs	3,33	1,12		
Student concentration	107	Up to 10 yrs	3,9	0,9	2,387	0,097
		From 10 to 20 yrs	3,6	1		
		Over 20 yrs	3,37	0,96		
Student fear and anxiety	107	Up to 10 yrs	3,95	0,93	1,162	0,317
		From 10 to 20 yrs	3,81	0,95		
		Over 20 yrs	3,58	0,88		
Student will and desire	107	Up to 10 yrs	2,92	1,18	0,421	0,657
		From 10 to 20 yrs	2,81	1,23		
		Over 20 yrs	3,12	1,67		
Student motivation and interests	107	Up to 10 yrs	3,75	0,95	1,943	0,148
		From 10 to 20 yrs	3,65	0,94		
		Over 20 yrs	3,25	1,18		
Student satisfaction and joy	107	Up to 10 yrs	4	0,84	4,855	0,010*
		From 10 to 20 yrs	3,3	1,3		
		Over 20 yrs	3,29	1,19		
Student insecurities	107	Up to 10 yrs	4,12	0,85	4,184	0,018*
		From 10 to 20 yrs	3,46	1,53		
		Over 20 yrs	3,29	1,33		

5. CONCLUSION

Facial expressions as a type of extralinguistic, nonverbal, kinesic signs imply facial expressions, that is, the movements or positions of facial muscles which can provide significant feedback on the emotional status, as well as the cognitive and conative processes of the participants in the communication process. Due to the fact that verbal expressions and freedom of their expression can vary in students depending on their age, temperament, gender, etc., kinesic, non-verbal signs allow us to receive non-verbal feedback in the classroom, whose objectivity is mostly indisputable. In order to achieve successful interaction in the classroom, which is based on good feedback, it is necessary to pay significant attention to this type of non-verbal signs. Independently and in combination with verbal signs, facial expressions provide relevant and reliable feedback of different types that ensure proper communication and interaction in the classroom. Based on the research conducted, the following conclusions can be made:

(1) The surveyed teachers have emphasized the importance of facial expressions as feedback of cognitive, emotional and conative character;

(2) Although in theory and practice, the informative value of facial expressions is especially emphasized in the field of emotions, the research also found that teachers receive significant feedback of the cognitive type, such as information about: student attentiveness, understanding, concentration and reasoning.

(3) Students' facial expressions provide the teachers with the least information about their will and desire, which is why the conative type of information is the least prominent type of feedback;

(4) The difference in attitudes that was found statistically significant was related to emotional feedback and was obtained in relation to the level of education variable. Class teachers more often recognize insecurity and feelings of satisfaction and joy through facial expressions;

(5) Years of service variable also affects the attitudes of teachers regarding the above-mentioned emotional feedback. The teachers with the least work experience were more sensitive to this (emotional) type of feedback obtained through facial expression.

(6) As we have already stated in the discussion section, the results obtained indicate an enviable level of quality in the research area and are directly related to some typical character-related and/or individual characteristics of certain student developmental phases, that is, to the qualitative characteristics of teacher professional development and identity.

(7) In order to improve the state found, it is necessary to for both teachers and students to be more confident to freely express, notice, react to and improve the skills and competencies of non-verbal communication and facial expressions as a type of kinesic non-verbal signs.

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FACIJALNA EKSPRESIJA U OSNOVNOŠKOLSKOJ NASTAVI KAO POV RATNA INFORMACIJA U KOMUNIKACIONOM PROCESU

Zasnovana na verbalnoj i neverbalnoj komunikaciji, nastava je u značajnoj meri determinisana njihovim osobenostima i kvalitetom ostvarivanja. Iako se u nastavi ove dve vrste komunikacije prepliću a njihove funkcije dijalektički povezuju, često se neverbalnoj komunikaciji i pojedinim njenim znakovima neopravdano pridaje manji značaj. Iz tog razloga u radu smo se fokusirali na facijalnu ekspresiju kao jedan od značajnih neverbalnih znakova u nastavnom procesu. Rad ima za cilj da utvrdi percepcije nastavnika o značaju facijalne ekspresije i vrsti povratnih informacija koje se njome najčešće dobijaju tokom nastavnog procesa. Uzorak istraživanja čini nastavnika 107 nastavnika osnovnih škola sa teritorije Školske uprave Niš. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da nastavnici prepoznaju ulogu facijalne ekspresije u nastavi i da su povratne informacije koje najčešće dobijaju facijalnom ekspresijom vezane za osećanja učenika i njegove kognitivne aktivnosti. Takođe, utvrđeno je da uzrast učenika odnosno nivo obrazovanja u kome nastavnici rade značajno determiniše različitost njihovih precepcija o ovom pitanju.

Ključne reči: facijalna ekspresija, osnovna škola, nastava, povratna informacija, komunikacija..