

# From Misinterpretation to Mastery: Nonverbal Communication Challenges in Job Interviews and EFL Pedagogical Solutions

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## Abstract

This study examined the pivotal role of nonverbal communication in job interview outcomes through a comparative analysis of perceptions between job applicants ( $n = 200$ ) and hiring managers ( $n = 75$ ) across five critical domains. Using a mixed-methods research design that incorporated both quantitative surveys and qualitative insights, the investigation revealed substantial disparities in how these two groups understand and utilize nonverbal cues in professional settings. The findings demonstrated statistically significant differences ( $p < .0001$ ) across all measured dimensions, with hiring managers exhibiting markedly greater awareness and interpretive sophistication regarding nonverbal signals compared to applicants. Most notably, the domain of symbolism and interpretation showed the largest effect size ( $d = 1.01$ ), indicating that hiring managers attribute considerably more evaluative weight to nonverbal behaviors like professional attire, posture, and vocal modulation than applicants anticipate. Similarly, pronounced gaps emerged in awareness and training (82% of managers vs. 64% of applicants reporting adequate preparation) and virtual interview challenges (80% vs. 68% recognition of difficulties). These disparities were particularly pronounced in cross-cultural contexts, where applicants demonstrated a less consistent understanding of culturally contingent nonverbal norms ( $SD = 1.0$  vs.  $0.8$  for managers). The study's implications extend directly to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where teachers play a crucial role in bridging these communication gaps. By implementing integrated training that combines linguistic proficiency with nonverbal fluency - including cultural semiotics, virtual presence optimization, and professional presentation skills - EFL educators can significantly enhance students' interview readiness. The findings advocate for curriculum reforms that address both verbal and nonverbal dimensions of professional communication, particularly in preparing students for the multimodal demands of global job markets. Future research should explore the longitudinal impact of such training interventions on actual hiring outcomes while examining sector-specific variations in nonverbal expectations across different industries and cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Nonverbal Communication, Job Interviews, EFL Pedagogy, Professional Skills, Intercultural Competence

## 1. Background of Study

Nonverbal communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, playing a critical role in conveying emotions, intentions, and professionalism. In high-stakes environments such as job interviews, nonverbal cues—including eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions, and vocal tone—often carry more weight than spoken words [1]. Research in pragmatics

and semiotics highlights how these signals shape interpersonal judgments, with hiring managers frequently relying on nonverbal behavior to assess a candidate's confidence, credibility, and cultural fit [2]. While verbal communication conveys explicit information, nonverbal cues provide implicit insights into an applicant's demeanor, emotional state, and social competence [3]. For recent graduates entering competitive job markets—particularly in

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fields such as English, Business Administration, and Nursing—mastering nonverbal communication is essential for projecting professionalism and adaptability. However, studies indicate that many job seekers lack sufficient training in this area, leading to misaligned body language, inappropriate gestures, or unintentional expressions of anxiety [4]. Additionally, cultural differences further complicate nonverbal interactions, as norms regarding eye contact, personal space, and hand gestures vary widely across societies [5]. Applicants from diverse backgrounds may inadvertently violate unspoken expectations, while hiring managers may misinterpret cues due to limited cross-cultural awareness [6].

The increasing prevalence of virtual interviews, accelerated by digital transformation and remote work trends, has introduced new challenges in nonverbal communication. Unlike face-to-face interactions, video-mediated interviews restrict full-body visibility, alter vocal dynamics, and introduce technological barriers such as lag and poor camera angles [7]. These limitations disrupt traditional nonverbal feedback loops, forcing applicants to adapt their body language and vocal delivery for digital contexts [8]. Hiring managers, meanwhile, must recalibrate their assessment strategies to account for reduced nonverbal cues, potentially leading to inconsistencies in candidate evaluations [9].

Given these complexities, this study examines the interplay between nonverbal communication, cultural context, and technological mediation in job interviews. By analyzing the perspectives of both applicants and hiring managers across three professional fields, the research seeks to identify gaps in awareness, training, and interpretation of nonverbal signals. The findings will contribute to improved job readiness programs and more equitable hiring practices, ensuring that both candidates and employers can navigate nonverbal communication effectively in both traditional and virtual interview settings.

### 1.1. Research Focus

Nonverbal communication plays a fundamental role in all facets of human interaction; however, its impact becomes particularly significant in high-stakes environments such as job interviews. This study focuses on the semiotic and pragmatic dimensions of nonverbal communication within job interviews, aiming to bridge theoretical perspectives with real-world applications. Drawing from the fields of English, Business Administration, and Nursing, the research investigates the dual perspectives of job applicants and hiring managers, emphasizing how nonverbal cues influence perceptions, decisions, and professional impressions.

The research is guided by five thematic scopes: awareness and training, behavioral control and adaptability, cultural and contextual sensitivity, communication challenges in virtual settings, and the symbolism and interpretation of nonverbal behavior. These categories frame the empirical investigation, which involves 200 job seekers and 75 hiring professionals from the disciplines.

The study seeks to understand how applicants employ nonverbal strategies—such as posture, facial expression, eye contact, and

tone of voice—to convey professionalism, confidence, and cultural competence. Simultaneously, it explores how hiring managers interpret these cues to evaluate candidate suitability, manage expectations, and adapt to virtual communication challenges. In doing so, the research uncovers the nuanced interplay between verbal language, symbols, and embodied meaning.

By addressing both in-person and virtual interview contexts, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on nonverbal semiotics and pragmatics. It also aims to inform educational and professional development practices, advocating structured training in nonverbal communication as a key component of job readiness and candidate evaluation frameworks.

### 1.2. Problem Statement

Despite the recognized importance of verbal communication in job interviews, nonverbal communication remains underexplored, especially across diverse fields such as English, Business Administration, and Nursing. Graduates often face challenges in expressing professionalism and confidence nonverbally, while hiring managers struggle to accurately interpret candidates' body language, especially in virtual settings. Cultural misunderstandings and a lack of formal training further compound the issue. This study addresses the gap by evaluating how both applicants and employers perceive and employ nonverbal communication, aiming to enhance mutual understanding and effectiveness in interview contexts.

### 1.3. Research Objectives

This study aims to systematically investigate the critical role of nonverbal communication in job interview success across three professional fields. Building on existing literature in pragmatics and semiotics, the research seeks to understand how nonverbal cues function in both traditional and virtual interview settings, while accounting for cultural influences and practical applications. The objectives are designed to provide actionable insights for both job candidates and hiring professionals.

- i. To identify and analyze the pragmatic and semiotic functions of nonverbal communication in job interviews across the English, Business Administration, and Nursing fields.
- ii. To examine how nonverbal behaviors interact with verbal language and symbolic interpretation in influencing hiring outcomes.
- iii. To investigate the role of cultural norms and contextual variables in shaping the perception and use of nonverbal communication in interviews.
- iv. To explore the impact of virtual interview environments on the expression and interpretation of nonverbal cues by both job applicants and hiring managers.
- v. To develop practical recommendations for job seekers and hiring professionals to enhance interview performance and evaluation through effective nonverbal communication strategies.

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## 1.4. Scope of the Study

This research explores the function and significance of nonverbal communication within the frameworks of pragmatics and semiotics during job interviews. It focuses on two core perspectives: those of job applicants and hiring managers, across three diverse academic and professional fields—English, Business Administration, and Nursing. The study investigates nonverbal elements such as body language, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and their cultural and symbolic interpretations.

### *Five Key Areas Frame the Scope of this Study:*

- Awareness and training regarding nonverbal communication among job seekers and employers.
- Behavioral control and adaptability of nonverbal signals in interview settings.
- Cultural and contextual sensitivity in interpreting and using nonverbal cues.
- Communication challenges and strategies related to virtual interviews.
- Symbolic meaning and interpretive value of nonverbal signals during interview interactions.

The empirical approach involves quantitative survey data from 200 job applicants and 75 hiring managers. The research outcomes are intended to support improved practices in career preparation and hiring evaluation, with a focus on nonverbal communication's practical and theoretical implications.

## 1.5. Research Questions

To align with the scope of the surveys conducted, the research questions are developed around five thematic categories: (i) awareness and training in nonverbal communication, (ii) behavioral control and adaptability, (iii) cultural and contextual sensitivity, (iv) communication challenges in virtual interviews, and (v) symbolism and interpretation of nonverbal signals.

These categories reflect both the applicant and employer perspectives and aim to explore how nonverbal behaviors influence the interview process, job readiness, and candidate evaluation.

- To what extent are job applicants aware of the importance of nonverbal communication, and have they received adequate training?
- How do job applicants and hiring managers demonstrate control and adaptability in their nonverbal behavior during interviews?
- What role do cultural and contextual differences play in the interpretation of nonverbal cues by applicants and hiring managers?
- What are the perceived challenges and adaptations related to nonverbal communication in virtual job interviews?
- How do applicants and hiring managers interpret symbolic elements of nonverbal communication, such as gestures, posture, and attire?

## 2. Literature Review

Nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in job interviews, influencing hiring decisions and shaping perceptions of

professionalism, confidence, and competence. Research in pragmatics and semiotics highlights how nonverbal cues—such as body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and vocal tone—convey meaning beyond spoken words [1]. This literature review synthesizes existing studies on nonverbal communication in interview settings, focusing on five key scopes: (i) awareness and training, (ii) behavioral adaptability, (iii) cultural sensitivity, (iv) virtual interviews, and (v) symbolic interpretation.

### 2.1. Awareness and Training in Nonverbal Communication

Many job applicants lack formal training in nonverbal communication, despite its significant impact on interview success. Studies show that candidates who use positive body language—such as maintaining eye contact, adopting open postures, and nodding—are perceived as more confident and competent [4,10]. However, Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd argue that mere awareness is insufficient; structured training programs are necessary to help applicants align their nonverbal behavior with employer expectations [2]. Research by Woodzicka and LaFrance further suggests that women and minorities face additional challenges, as their nonverbal behaviors are often scrutinized more critically than those of their counterparts [11].

Hiring managers also require training to interpret nonverbal cues accurately. Misinterpretations can lead to biased decisions, particularly when interviewers rely on instinct rather than evidence-based evaluation [9]. A study by Huffcutt et al. found that interviewers who received nonverbal communication training made more consistent and fair hiring decisions [12]. These findings highlight the need for standardized training programs for both applicants and employers to minimize unconscious bias and improve interview outcomes.

### 2.2. Behavioral Control and Adaptability

Effective nonverbal communication requires situational adaptability. Applicants must adjust their body language based on interview dynamics, while hiring managers must accurately decode these signals. Research by DeGroot and Gooty suggests that candidates who exhibit controlled yet natural nonverbal behavior—such as mirroring the interviewer's posture—are more likely to succeed. Conversely, excessive rigidity, fidgeting, or lack of eye contact can undermine credibility [13,14].

Employers, meanwhile, must balance nonverbal assessments with verbal responses to avoid subjective biases. A meta-analysis by Barrick et al. found that interviewers often overestimate the reliability of nonverbal cues, leading to inconsistent evaluations [15]. To mitigate this, structured interview protocols that incorporate standardized nonverbal assessment criteria have been shown to improve hiring accuracy [16].

### 2.3. Cultural and Contextual Sensitivity

Cultural differences significantly influence nonverbal communication. Gestures, personal space, and eye contact norms vary across cultures, leading to potential misunderstandings in cross-cultural interviews [17]. For example, while direct eye contact is

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valued in Western cultures, it may be perceived as confrontational in Asian and Middle Eastern contexts [18]. Applicants from diverse backgrounds must navigate these nuances, while hiring managers should receive training in culturally sensitive evaluation [6].

Research by Molinsky et al. highlights how cultural code-switching—adjusting nonverbal behavior to align with dominant cultural norms—can improve interview performance for minority candidates [19]. However, this practice may also lead to cognitive fatigue, suggesting that organizations should foster more inclusive interview practices rather than expecting candidates to conform entirely [20].

## 2.4. Virtual Interview Challenges

The rise of remote interviews has altered nonverbal dynamics. Limited camera visibility, technological delays, and reduced social presence affect how facial expressions and gestures are perceived [7]. Applicants must adapt by exaggerating positive expressions, maintaining steady eye contact with the camera, and minimizing environmental distractions [8].

Hiring managers, meanwhile, must recalibrate their assessment criteria for digital settings. A study by Finkelstein et al. found that virtual interviews amplify biases related to vocal tone and facial expressions, as subtle cues are harder to detect [21]. To address this, organizations are increasingly using AI-driven tools to analyze nonverbal behavior in video interviews, though ethical concerns about algorithmic bias remain [22].

## 2.5. Symbolism and Interpretation of Nonverbal Cues

Semiotics examines how nonverbal signals are interpreted symbolically. Attire, posture, and gestures carry implicit meanings—for example, a firm handshake symbolizes confidence, while fidgeting may indicate anxiety [3]. Hiring managers often rely on these cues to assess cultural fit and professionalism [23].

However, subjective interpretations can lead to inconsistencies in evaluation. Research by Rule and Ambady found that snap judgments based on nonverbal cues often correlate with hiring decisions, even when irrelevant to job performance [24]. This underscores the need for standardized assessment frameworks that distinguish between meaningful nonverbal signals and superficial biases [25].

Existing research underscores the critical role of nonverbal communication in job interviews, yet gaps remain in cross-cultural and virtual contexts. This study contributes by examining awareness, adaptability, and interpretation of nonverbal cues from both applicant and employer perspectives. Findings will inform training programs and hiring practices, enhancing interview effectiveness across diverse fields.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively examine the role of nonverbal communication in job interviews

across three professional fields: English, Business Administration, and Nursing. Combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights, the research employs both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to identify patterns in nonverbal behavior, while thematic analysis of open-ended responses provides depth to the interpretation of findings. This dual-method design bridges empirical measurement with nuanced understanding, aligning with the study's theoretical framework of pragmatics and semiotics. The approach enables a holistic exploration of how nonverbal cues function as communicative signs (semiotics) and how their interpretation depends on interview contexts (pragmatics).

### 3.2. Data Collection

#### 3.2.1. Primary Data is Gathered Through two Structured Surveys

Survey 1: Targets 200 recent graduates from King Saud University (summer 2024) actively seeking jobs in the three fields. The instrument measures five domains: (i) awareness/training, (ii) behavioral adaptability, (iii) cultural sensitivity, (iv) virtual interview challenges, and (v) symbolic interpretation of nonverbal cues.

Survey 2: Collects responses from 75 hiring managers in corresponding sectors, evaluating how they perceive and assess candidate nonverbal behavior in interviews.

Both surveys use Likert-scale questions for quantitative analysis and include open-ended items for qualitative insights. Digital platforms (e.g., Google Forms) ensure efficient distribution and standardized responses.

### 3.3. Sample Selection

#### 3.3.1. The participant pool comprises

- Job applicants: 200 graduates (balanced across English, Business Administration, and Nursing) from King Saud University, selected via stratified random sampling to ensure diversity in gender, cultural background, and academic performance.
- Hiring managers: 75 professionals (25 per field) with at least 3 years of interview experience, recruited through industry partnerships and professional networks.

Inclusion criteria for applicants: active job-seeking status and no prior formal training in nonverbal communication. For hiring managers: current involvement in recruitment processes. This targeted sampling ensures data relevance while capturing sector-specific nuances in nonverbal communication expectations.

### 3.4. Instrument Validity and Reliability

To ensure the robustness of the study's findings, rigorous measures were implemented to establish the validity and reliability of the survey instruments. Content validity was achieved through a multi-stage process. First, the survey questions were developed based on an extensive review of literature in nonverbal communication, pragmatics, and semiotics, ensuring alignment with established theoretical constructs. The surveys were then reviewed by a panel of three experts in communication studies and

human resource management to assess the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of each item. Their feedback was incorporated to refine question wording and eliminate ambiguities, resulting in instruments that accurately measure the intended domains of nonverbal communication in interview settings.

Reliability was assessed through a pilot study conducted with 30 participants (15 job applicants and 15 hiring managers) from similar demographics as the target sample. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each survey domain to evaluate internal consistency. All domains demonstrated high reliability, with alpha values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating strong inter-item correlation. For instance, the "Behavioral Control and Adaptability" section achieved an alpha of 0.82, while "Cultural and Contextual Sensitivity" scored 0.79. Test-retest reliability was also examined by re-administering the survey to the same pilot group after a two-week interval, yielding a correlation coefficient of 0.85, which confirms measurement stability over time.

To address construct validity, principal component analysis (PCA) was performed on the pilot data, confirming that survey items loaded appropriately onto their theoretical domains without significant cross-loading. For example, questions about eye contact and posture loaded distinctly onto the "Behavioral Control" factor, while items on cultural norms aligned with the "Cultural Sensitivity" factor. This statistical validation, combined with expert input, ensures that the instruments precisely capture the study's key variables—nonverbal awareness, adaptability, cultural competence, virtual communication challenges, and symbolic interpretation—while minimizing measurement error. These steps

collectively guarantee that the data collected will yield credible and actionable insights into nonverbal.

### 3.5. Data Analysis- Findings

Nonverbal communication serves as a critical yet often underappreciated dimension of professional interactions, particularly in high-stakes environments such as job interviews. This study investigates the perceptual disparities between job applicants (n = 200) and hiring managers (n = 75) across five key domains of nonverbal communication: (i) awareness and training, (ii) behavioral control and adaptability, (iii) cultural and contextual sensitivity, (iv) challenges in virtual interviews, and (v) symbolism and interpretation of nonverbal signals. Utilizing a mixed-methods analytical framework—incorporating descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentages) and inferential statistics (independent samples (t-tests)—we assess the extent to which these two groups diverge in their understanding and application of nonverbal cues. The findings reveal statistically robust differences ( $p < .0001$ ), with hiring managers consistently demonstrating heightened sensitivity to nonverbal communication compared to applicants. Notably, the largest discrepancy emerges in the domain of symbolism and interpretation (Cohen's  $d = 1.01$ ), suggesting that applicants significantly underestimate the semiotic weight that hiring managers assign to nonverbal behaviors such as posture, attire, and vocal modulation. These results underscore a critical gap in applicant preparation and highlight the need for structured training interventions to align nonverbal communication expectations between evaluators and candidates. Tables 1 and 2 below show extensive details about the findings.

Category	Applicants (Mean ± SD)	Managers (Mean ± SD)	Applicants (%)	Managers (%)
Awareness and Training	3.2 ± 0.9	4.1 ± 0.7	64%	82%
Behavioral Control & Adaptability	3.6 ± 0.8	4.2 ± 0.75	72%	84%
Cultural & Contextual Sensitivity	3.1 ± 1.0	3.8 ± 0.8	62%	76%
Online Interview Communication	3.4 ± 0.85	4.0 ± 0.9	68%	80%
Symbolism and Interpretation	3.5 ± 0.9	4.3 ± 0.85	70%	86%

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Job Applicants and Hiring Managers**

This table highlights key differences in perceptions of nonverbal communication between job applicants (n=200) and hiring managers (n=75).

The descriptive statistics reveal notable differences between job applicants and hiring managers in their perceptions of nonverbal communication across five key domains. In Awareness and Training, hiring managers (M=4.1, SD=0.7, 82%) reported significantly higher levels of formal training and conscious recognition of nonverbal cues compared to applicants (M=3.2, SD=0.9, 64%), suggesting that applicants often lack structured guidance in this critical aspect of interview performance.

Similarly, in Behavioral Control & Adaptability, managers (M=4.2,

SD=0.75, 84%) demonstrated greater confidence in regulating their nonverbal behavior than applicants (M=3.6, SD=0.8, 72%), with the 12% gap in agreement rates indicating that applicants may struggle with deliberate self-presentation during high-stakes interactions.

When examining Cultural & Contextual Sensitivity, managers (M=3.8, SD=0.8, 76%) displayed a stronger understanding of how cultural norms shape nonverbal communication than applicants (M=3.1, SD=1.0, 62%), with the higher standard deviation among applicants reflecting inconsistent awareness of these dynamics.

The challenges of Online Interview Communication were more pronounced for managers (M=4.0, SD=0.9, 80%) than applicants

( $M=3.4$ ,  $SD=0.85$ , 68%), as the 12% disparity suggests applicants may not fully appreciate how technical constraints in virtual settings—such as limited camera visibility or audio delays—disrupt effective nonverbal exchange.

Most strikingly, the largest divide emerged in Symbolism and Interpretation, where managers ( $M=4.3$ ,  $SD=0.85$ , 86%) attributed far greater weight to symbolic cues like professional attire, posture, and vocal tone than applicants ( $M=3.5$ ,  $SD=0.9$ , 70%), with the 16% difference highlighting a fundamental mismatch in how each group perceives the role of nonverbal signals in shaping hiring outcomes. Collectively, these findings underscore a pervasive gap

in both the valuation and mastery of nonverbal communication between those evaluating and those navigating the interview process.

Finally, this table presents the average ratings and variability in perception between the two groups. Hiring managers scored consistently higher across all five domains, indicating a stronger emphasis on nonverbal communication. Notably, the largest gap exists in "Symbolism and Interpretation," where applicants appear to underappreciate how their nonverbal expressions (e.g., posture, attire, gestures) impact evaluations.

Category	t-statistic	p-value
Awareness and Training	-7.59	< .0001
Behavioral Control & Adaptability	-5.88	< .0001
Cultural & Contextual Sensitivity	-5.74	< .0001
Online Interview Communication	-4.87	< .0001
Symbolism and Interpretation	-8.31	< .0001

**Table 2: Independent Samples T-Test Results Comparing Groups**

The results of the independent samples t-test analysis in Table 2 revealed robust and statistically significant disparities (all  $p < .0001$ ;  $\alpha = .001$ ) between applicant and hiring manager cohorts across all measured dimensions of nonverbal communication evaluation. of particular theoretical and practical significance was the exceptionally large effect size observed for Symbolism and Interpretation ( $t(273) = -8.31$ ,  $p < .0001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.01$ ), constituting a full standard deviation difference between groups. This finding strongly supports the hypothesis that hiring managers engage in significantly more sophisticated semiotic processing of nonverbal cues (including proxemics, haptic, and paralinguistic signals) than applicants anticipate during interview performance.

The analysis further demonstrated a substantial divergence in Awareness and Training ( $t(273) = -7.59$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.92$ ), with the near-large effect size indicating that organizational representatives benefit from systematic training in nonverbal decoding that typically exceeds candidate preparation by approximately 18 percentage points (82% vs 64%). For Online Interview Communication, while still demonstrating strong statistical significance ( $t(273) = -4.87$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.59$ ), the moderate effect size suggests an important but less extreme disjunction in virtual communication expectations, potentially reflecting differential experience with computer-mediated communication channels.

These findings collectively provide compelling empirical evidence that the two groups occupy fundamentally different phenomenological positions regarding nonverbal communication in evaluative contexts (all p-values exceeding the .001 significance threshold by multiple orders of magnitude). The pattern of results supports an interpretation framework wherein hiring managers operate as trained decoders within an organizational semiotic

system, while applicants function as relatively naive encoders, creating substantial potential for miscommunication and evaluation bias. The robust effect sizes across all measured domains (range  $d = 0.59-1.01$ ) suggest these differences are not merely statistically detectable but practically meaningful in real-world hiring contexts.

In conclusion, each domain shows statistically significant differences between job applicants and hiring managers. The p-values are below the .001 threshold, affirming robust differences in how each group perceives nonverbal aspects. The most pronounced difference is in the area of symbolism, where managers assign greater interpretative value to cues like grooming, clothing, and tone of voice.

#### 4. Summary of the Findings

The empirical findings of this study yield several consequential insights into the role of nonverbal communication in job interviews, with significant implications for both theory and practice. First, the data confirm a pronounced perceptual asymmetry between job applicants and hiring managers, with the latter group exhibiting substantially greater awareness, training, and interpretive sophistication regarding nonverbal cues. This disparity is most acute in the domain of symbolism and interpretation ( $t(273) = -8.31$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 1.01$ ), where hiring managers attribute far greater evaluative significance to nonverbal signals than applicants anticipate. The magnitude of this effect—exceeding a full standard deviation—suggests that applicants operate within a fundamentally different communicative paradigm, often failing to recognize how deeply nonverbal behaviors influence hiring outcomes.

Second, the analysis reveals a persistent deficit in applicant preparedness, particularly in virtual interview settings ( $t(273)$

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= -4.87,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.59$ ). While hiring managers report significant challenges in assessing nonverbal cues in digital environments (80% agreement), applicants appear less attuned to these limitations (68% agreement), potentially compromising their performance in remote hiring contexts. This finding aligns with broader literature on computer-mediated communication, which emphasizes the reduced bandwidth for nonverbal signaling in virtual interactions.

Third, the study highlights systemic gaps in cultural and contextual sensitivity ( $t(273) = -5.74$ ,  $p < .0001$ ), with hiring managers (76% agreement) demonstrating greater awareness of how cultural norms shape nonverbal behavior than applicants (62% agreement). The higher variability ( $SD = 1.0$ ) among applicants further suggests inconsistent exposure to cross-cultural communication training, raising concerns about equitable evaluation in diverse hiring pools.

## 5. Discussion of Findings and Implications for EFL Education

The empirical findings of this study reveal significant disparities in nonverbal communication competence between job applicants and hiring managers, with particularly striking implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The data demonstrate that hiring managers possess substantially greater awareness and interpretive skills regarding nonverbal cues ( $M=4.1$  vs.  $3.2$  for applicants,  $p < .0001$ ), echoing previous research by Knapp et al., which established that over 60% of interpersonal meaning in professional contexts derives from nonverbal channels. This perceptual gap becomes especially problematic for EFL students, who must navigate both linguistic and paralinguistic challenges in interview situations [1,26].

The most pronounced discrepancy emerged in symbolism and interpretation ( $d=1.01$ ), where hiring managers placed significantly greater weight on nonverbal signals than applicants anticipated. This finding aligns with Burgoon's expectancy violation theory, suggesting that EFL students may be particularly vulnerable to negative evaluations when their nonverbal behavior violates interviewers' cultural expectations [27]. The 16% perception gap in this domain underscores the critical need for explicit instruction in professional semiotics within EFL curricula.

Regarding virtual communication challenges, the 12% disparity in perceptions (80% of managers vs. 68% of applicants recognizing difficulties) reflects what Derks et al. term "digital nonverbal illiteracy" [28]. For EFL students, this gap may be exacerbated by limited exposure to technology-mediated communication in English. The moderate effect size ( $d=0.59$ ) nevertheless suggests this is an area where targeted training could yield significant improvements in interview performance.

The cultural sensitivity findings (76% manager awareness vs. 62% applicant awareness) mirror Matsumoto and Hwang's research on cultural display rules in professional settings. EFL classrooms represent ideal environments for developing this intercultural competence through comparative analysis of nonverbal norms across cultures [29]. The higher variability among applicants

( $SD=1.0$ ) particularly highlights the need for systematic training in this domain.

## 6. The Role of English Teachers in Developing Workplace Communication Skills

English teachers serving EFL populations occupy a unique position to bridge these communication gaps through targeted pedagogical interventions:

### 6.1. Integrated Nonverbal Training

- Implement "mirror exercises" where students practice and analyze their nonverbal presentation [30].
- Incorporate video analysis of TED Talks or interviews to decode professional nonverbal cues [31].
- Teach the "Power Posing" technique to enhance confidence in interviews [32].

### 6.2. Virtual Communication Preparation

- Conduct mock interviews via Zoom with recording for playback analysis.
- Teach camera positioning, lighting optimization, and virtual background selection.
- Practice overcoming technological limitations through exaggerated nonverbal cues.

### 6.3. Cultural Semiotics Instruction

- Contrast nonverbal norms across cultures (e.g., eye contact, personal space).
- Analyze case studies of intercultural communication failures
- Role-play scenarios requiring cultural code-switching.

### 6.4. Classroom Presentation Training

- Structure progressive presentation assignments from 1-minute pitches to full interviews.
- Incorporate peer evaluations focusing on verbal-nonverbal alignment.
- Teach professional expectations through "dress for success" workshops.

### 6.5. Assessment and Feedback

- Develop rubrics evaluating both verbal and nonverbal performance.
- Provide video-recorded feedback highlighting specific improvement areas.
- Implement metacognitive reflection exercises on communication development.

This integrated approach to verbal and nonverbal communication development can significantly enhance EFL students' workplace readiness, addressing the critical gaps identified in the current research while preparing them for the multimodal demands of global professional environments.

## 7. The Theoretical and Practical Implications

### 7.1. Theoretical Contributions

These findings reinforce the semiotic complexity of job interviews,

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positioning nonverbal communication as a critical, yet often mismatched, layer of meaning-making between applicants and evaluators. The robust effect sizes across all domains ( $d = 0.59\text{--}1.01$ ) validate the need for further research into the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms underlying nonverbal decoding in evaluative contexts.

## 7.2. Practical Interventions

- Applicant Training: Structured workshops on nonverbal communication—covering proxemics, kinesics, and paralinguistic cues—should be integrated into career development programs.
- Standardized Evaluation Rubrics: Organizations must develop evidence-based frameworks to mitigate unconscious bias in nonverbal assessments, particularly in virtual interviews.
- Cross-Cultural Competency: Training initiatives should address cultural variability in nonverbal norms to ensure equitable hiring practices.

## 8. Future Research Recommendations

- Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of nonverbal training on hiring outcomes.
- Cross-industry comparisons to assess sector-specific variations in nonverbal expectations.
- Experimental designs manipulating virtual interview conditions to isolate the effects of technical constraints on nonverbal decoding.

### 8.1. Extended Conclusion with EFL Teachers' Role in Professional Communication Development

In conclusion, this study highlights a critical disconnect between the perceived and actual roles of nonverbal communication in job interviews, revealing significant gaps in applicants' awareness of professional semiotics, cultural contextualization, and virtual communication norms. These findings carry profound implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where teachers serve as crucial mediators in preparing students for global workplace communication. EFL educators must adopt a dual-focused pedagogical approach that systematically develops both verbal proficiency and nonverbal competence through three key interventions:

- First, teachers should implement integrated communication training that combines linguistic accuracy with paralinguistic sophistication. This involves moving beyond traditional grammar instruction to incorporate: 1) micro-presentation drills with video analysis to develop awareness of posture, gestures, and facial expressions; 2) vocal modulation exercises targeting pitch, pace, and pause strategies in professional contexts; and 3) authentic interview simulations that replicate the multimodal demands of actual hiring processes [30]. By using AI-powered tools like speech analysis software and eye-tracking technology, teachers can provide students with objective feedback on their nonverbal delivery.

- Second, EFL curricula must prioritize cultural-semiotic literacy

through contrastive analysis of workplace communication norms across cultures. Teachers should design activities that: 1) compare acceptable professional behaviors in different cultural contexts (e.g., bowing vs. handshakes, eye contact norms); 2) analyze case studies of intercultural communication breakdowns in hiring situations; and 3) develop students' ability to strategically code-switch their nonverbal behavior [29]. This cultural agility becomes particularly crucial for students targeting multinational employers or remote positions with global teams.

- Third, teachers need to bridge the virtual communication gap through technology-enhanced practice. This requires: 1) structured training in optimizing webcam presence, including framing, lighting, and virtual background selection; 2) exercises in compensating for technological limitations through exaggerated facial expressions and deliberate gestures; and 3) simulated asynchronous video interview practice using platforms like HireVue [28]. Recording and analyzing these digital interactions helps students develop awareness of their digital body language.

To maximize employability outcomes, EFL programs should establish partnerships with career centers to: 1) align communication training with industry-specific expectations; 2) organize mock interviews with real hiring managers; and 3) create digital portfolios showcasing students' presentation skills. Teachers play a pivotal role in helping students understand that while linguistic competence opens doors, nonverbal intelligence often determines who walks through them [31]. By adopting this comprehensive approach to professional communication development, EFL educators can empower students to navigate job interviews with the integrated verbal and nonverbal fluency that today's competitive job market demands. Ultimately, this pedagogical shift will not only enhance individual career prospects but also contribute to more equitable hiring practices by demystifying the hidden curriculum of professional communication [33-73].

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