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EFL Learners' Perception of Their Teacher's Immediate Behavior (Verbal/ Non Verbal) and Their Communication Apprehension across Gender

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Achieving mastery of English in foreign language learning contexts is a daunting task for many EFL learners whose exposure to the target language is highly restricted and dominantly influenced by communication apprehension (CA). What may either deteriorate or ameliorate learners' CA can be their perception of their teachers' immediacy (TI) or the extent to which their teacher is accessible verbally and nonverbally. TI might be subject to individual variations like gender and is significant with regard to the impact it may exert on classroom atmosphere and learners' CA.

Methods: The present ex post facto correlational study set out to explore Iranian EFL learners' CA in relation to their perception of their male and female teachers' verbal and nonverbal immediacy. To this end, a purposive sample of 210 EFL learners in 30 classes taught by 30 teachers, including 17 females and 13 males, were selected from different English language institutes in Tabriz, Iran. The research data were gleaned through Personal Report of CA (PRCA) questionnaire and TI questionnaire comprising Nonverbal Immediacy and Verbal Immediacy (VI) scales to measure the participants' level of CA and their perception of teachers' VI and NVI. The research data were analyzed via MANOVA, an independent samples t-test, and linear regression.

Results: The results revealed no significant difference in the participants' CA taught by male and female teachers; it was also found that TI could not predict the participants' CA.

Conclusions: By broadening the scope of investigation, educators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how to effectively support language learners in overcoming communication barriers.

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Introduction

Since the dawn of the 21st century, the desire to communicate with the world provided the global impetus for numerous language learners striving to develop their command of English which is now considered as a lingua franca connecting the global village. Language is nor more viewed as a structural system that can be learned in a vacuum. It is now linked to the social context in which it is employed and the cognitive and cultural resources that are brought to the task of communication. Socioculturally, language is envisaged as a developing system made of fragments that are shaped in communicative situations (Lantolf, 2005) to serve one's expressive and reflective capabilities through exchanging meaning by verbally and nonverbally transmitting feelings, ideas, events, concepts or information to others (Jacopsen, 2009), sharing and developing new meanings (Segal, 2011). Attainment of this ultimate goal in classroom language learning, however, is reliant on a number of instructional factors such as learners' propensity to and apprehension of communication which might in turn be impacted by psychological barriers that learners bring to the classroom as well as the role teachers can play in facilitating or even hinder achievement of this goal.

From the learners' perspective, learning a new language has always been a daunting experience especially for EFL learners with highly restricted opportunities for natural communication for authentic purposes. What compounds the situation is the growing communication apprehension (CA) which is best defined by McCroskey (1977, p.87) as "an individual' level of fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. Two most common manifestations of CA are avoidance and reticence as a result of which the learners prefer to stay silent to avoid the negative consequences of making mistake or speak just a little. At the same time, learners with high level of CA have difficulty in concentrating on the current social context and suffer from anxious reactions of sweating and trembling during speech (Tiona & Sylvia, 2004).

Previous studies (Roach, 1999) have pointed to a negative relationship between communication apprehension and communication competencies, In addition, students with a high level of communication apprehension were observed to refrain from participating in class discussions and remain silent in the classroom, while those with a lower level of communication apprehension sat in front row seats, participated in classroom discussions and preferred challenging topics for

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discussion (Tiona & Sylvia, 2004). In collectivist social Iranian culture (similar to Japan, China and Turkey), the traditional authoritarian approach dominating the classrooms has waned to some extent especially in private language institutes, however, they still reserve some trails of collectivism. That is to say, tension to some degree is an expected outcome of communication with an authoritative figure. Thus, considering the influence of a culture of authority, communication apprehension of the students with their teachers or even among themselves is an inevitable issue. This feeling can be compounded if the immediate behavior of the teacher being verbal or nonverbal is improper. Besides the level of CA and the teacher's immediacy, the teacher's gender might also adversely or (positively) affect the situation. Numerous studies have sought to examine the association between this interpersonal behavior—immediacy—and student-related factors such as academic engagement, involvement, willingness to attend classes, cognitive learning, affective learning, course retention, satisfaction, and state/trait motivation (e.g., Roberts & Friedman, 2013; Faranda, 2015; Gholamrezaee & Ghanizadeh, 2018; Kalat, Yazdi, &Ghanizadeh, 2018; Pishghadam, Derakhshan, & Zhaleh 2019; Hussain, Khalid, & Akbar., 2020).

Apart from limitations in communicative opportunities, some of instructional factors like teacher immediacy (TI) might intensify learners' CA. The concept of immediacy was first coined by a social psychologist Mehrabian (1969) and is defined as "a set of communication behaviors which enhance closeness to and non-verbal interaction with another" (p. 202). Immediacy has been attributed to the motivational characteristic of approach-avoidance theory, which states that people approach what they like and avoid what they do not like (Myers et al., 2002; Rocca,2007). TI, according to Mehrabian (1971), has verbal and nonverbal components. Nonverbal immediate behaviors are actually abbreviated forms of approach and avoidance. In addition, he characterized verbal immediacy as stylistic differences in expression from which like-dislike is inferred. Research findings have suggested that teacher' behaviors, verbal and nonverbal, can either foster or hinder student participation and interactional tendencies (Witt, Schrodt, Wheeless, & Bryand, 2014).

Affective learning has been described as learning from focusing on a positive or negative attitude a student develops towards the subject or the teacher (Christophel, 1990). Student affective learning is comprised of student attitudes that include concerns about the course, its content, and the instructor's behavior. This is particularly true of post method learners, who are assumed to be

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actively involved in various stages of learning to learn how to learn and attain autonomy (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). One of the most important affective factors that can influence learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities is learners' Communication Apprehension (CA), which is generally regarded as a level of fear or anxiety (Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998) because it can directly influence learners' participation in the learning activities, and thereby, greatly impact the rate of learning and the ultimate level of attainment. Mentoor (2015) explored the relationship between communication skills, communication apprehension and academic achievement of 779 male and female learners in the secondary phase in Western Cape; the results revealed distinct relationships between communication skills and communication apprehension (group work, meetings and public speaking).

One fundamental aspect of teaching that can have direct impact on learners' affective reactions and participatory readiness is teachers' verbal and nonverbal behavior. This factor has been identified as Teacher Immediacy (TI) by Mehrabian (1976); as postulated by Andersen and Andersen (1982), embodies a set of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that teachers display in their classroom which influence their closeness with their students. several scholars (e.g., Sheybani, 2019; Sutiyatno, 2018; Lee, 2020; Violanti, Kelly, Garland, & Christen, 2018) have pointed to the pivotal role of teachers' immediate behaviors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)/English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. Violanti et al. (2018), for instance, explicated that language teachers' immediate behaviors play a crucial role in the EFL/ESL classrooms because these actions are capable of leading students toward more desirable outcomes. Sheybani (2019) further expounded that teacher immediacy attributes can dramatically enhance EFL/ESL students' willingness to attend classes, which in turn improves

their academic achievements. It is mainly due to the fact that "students who attend class regularly have a much greater chance of making high grades" (Moore, Jensen, Hatch, Duranczyk, Staats, & Koch, 2003, p. 325).

Gender issues have also been investigated from different aspects; however, just a few have explored the relationship between teacher's gender and their immediacy or the role of teacher's gender on learners' CA. For instance, Gendrin and Rucker (2009) examined the impact of gender on teacher immediacy and student motivation to learn in the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) classroom. The relationship between verbal and nonverbal immediacy and

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perceived cognitive and affective learning outcomes did not differ between men and women. The findings indicated that nonverbal immediacy was more predictive of learning outcomes than verbal immediacy for both African American men and women.

Rowden and Carlson's (1996) study revealed that for 197 undergraduate students (105 women and 92 men) immediacy, course evaluation, and evaluations of their teachers (104 men and 92 women) were positively correlated. There were no differences by gender for immediacy, but female instructors received *higher* teacher *and* course ratings than their male peers, and female students with male instructors rated the course *lower* than any other gender grouping.

According to Menzel and Carrell's (1999) study, teacher verbal immediacy behavior was positively related to a student's willingness to talk in class, while gender was not a factor for this outcome. Instructor verbal immediacy behavior was positively related to a student's perceived learning. While students perceived more learning from a professor of the same gender, the effect was strongly mediated by instructor verbal immediacy behavior.

Typical Iranian EFL learners seem to be vulnerable to CA. This vulnerability might be attributed to a wide range of individual as well as sociocultural characteristics that define Iranian EFL learners and the cultural characteristics of the context in which they learn. The current study was launched to explore Iranian EFL teachers' immediacy across gender and Iranian EFL learners' CA level. To this end, the following research questions were proposed:

Q1. Are there any significant gender differences in Iranian EFL teachers' verbal and nonverbal immediacy as perceived by the learners attending their class?

Q2. Do EFL learners taught by male and female teachers differ significantly in terms of their communication apprehension (CA)?

Q3. Can EFL students' perception of their male and female teachers' immediate behavior predict their communication apprehension (CA)?

Material and Methods

Participants

The participants of this descriptive-correlational study included 210 male (91) and female (119) learners at the age range of 18 to 30 studying English at three different institutes in Tabriz, Iran. They were all at intermediate level and had already taken placement tests and were interviewed to

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sit at proper level classrooms. Based on nonprobability sampling, the learners who had had the same teacher for two successive terms were purposively selected to make sure of their correct judgement on their teacher's immediate behavior. It should be noted that the questionnaires were given to all the students but later the applicable ones were considered. All three questionnaires of the study were given to them in the last 15 minutes of the class and the correct instruction was given in advance.

The other participants were the 30 male (13) and female (17) teachers all having the experience of teaching from 7 to 10 years, taken TTC classes of acceptable standard and held M.A. in English teaching, and were within the age range of 25 to 35. They were teaching the books assigned by each institute at intermediate level to the participants of the study. These 30 classes had 5 to 7 students.

Instruments

In order to conduct the study, three instruments were employed to glean the research data. They are explained next.

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension: Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA- 24) developed by McCroskey (1982), was used to measure learner's CA level. This established instrument is composed of twenty-four statements concerning feelings about communicating with other people in Likert scale, choices ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) on the four contexts (groups, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking) and the score ranges from a low of 6 to a high of 30. To determine one's overall CA score, all four sub-scores are added up to give minimum of 24 and a maximum of 120. Scores between 83 and 120 indicate a high level, between 55 and 83 indicate a moderate level and those between 24 and 55 show a low level of communication apprehension (Foo, 2015). According to McCroskey (1971, as cited in McCroskey & Anderson, 1976), the PRCA has been employed extensively in previous research studies involving CA and has consistently produced internal reliability estimates above.90 and test-retest reliability above .80. It has also been validated in the present study; the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be .78.

Teachers' Verbal Immediacy Scale: The verbal (VIM) questionnaire (Gorham, 1988) was employed to probe the EFL learners' perception of their teachers' verbal immediate behavior. This questionnaire includes 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1= Never; 2=Rarely;

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3=Sometimes; 4= Often; and 5= Almost always). The items indicating immediate behaviors include the use of humor or personal examples, getting feedback, or even calling students by name. The mean score is considered 60±5, hence, a group average below the mean is considered as perceiving the teachers as less immediate and one above the mean as immediate. The closer the mean to 100, the more immediate and accessible the teacher (Appendix B). The reliability of this scale was also computed (Cronbach alpha level=0.80)

Teacher's Nonverbal Immediacy Scale: For measuring nonverbal immediacy, the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995) consisting of 15 items was used. Respondents were asked to report the frequency of each immediate behavior, using a 5-Likert scale from never to very often. Nonverbal immediacy behaviors include eye contact, relaxed body posture and positioning, gesturing while talking to the class, smiling, facial, vocal expressiveness and physical proximity. Prior studies showed that the items relating to 'touching and sitting or standing while teaching' were poor items in all of the samples due to the almost nonexistent touching of students by their teachers in virtually all cultures (Rashidi & Mahmodi Kia, 2012).

This questionnaire was also piloted in a norm group of 25 learners sharing the characteristics of the target participants and the Cronbach's reliability coefficient of it was found to be acceptably high, 0.83 (n=25). For both questionnaires (verbal and nonverbal), reversed scores were given to non-immediate items so that high scores always represented high levels of immediacy. The Nonverbal Teachers' Immediacy poses 14 items; their Mean should be 39±5 respectively (Appendix C).

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to the study, the instruments were piloted on a norm group of 25 sharing the characteristics of the participants. After the selection of the participants, we administered the three scales to the participants in the last fifteen minutes of the classes and explained the procedure thoroughly. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, they were informed that the collected information would be used only for the research purposes, and just the age and gender were mentioned on the demographic part of the scales. The collected responses were entered into SPSS to be analyzed.

Data Analysis

In the current study, descriptive statistics and the MANOVA test were used to analyze the differences considering the teachers' gender and immediacy. T-test was run to find the significance

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of the difference between the participants' CA level considering and their teachers' gender and to find the predictability of the participants' CA through the teacher's immediacy, we ran linear regression test.

Results

Prior to the study, the VTI and NTI questionnaire were validated. Next, having collected the research data, the normality of the data was estimated along with descriptive statistics to get a clear picture of the research variables. The assumption of normality was probed by computing the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors. Since the computed ratios (Table 1) were lower than 1.96; i.e. critical value of Z-score at .05 levels (Field, 2018), it was concluded that the assumption of normality was retained.

Table 1. Normality of statistics for male and female teacher's verbal and non- verbal immediacy as perceived by EFL learners

Gender		N	Skewness			Kurtosis		
		Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Male	Communication Apprehension	91	-.047	.253	-0.19	.104	.500	0.21
	Verbal Immediacy	91	-.036	.253	-0.14	-.432	.500	-0.86
	None Verbal Immediacy	91	-.211	.253	-0.83	-.177	.500	-0.35
Female	Communication Apprehension	119	-.152	.222	-0.68	.497	.440	1.13
	Verbal Immediacy	119	.107	.222	0.48	-.058	.440	-0.13
	None Verbal Immediacy	119	-.140	.222	-0.63	-.089	.440	-0.20

Having checked the normality of the data, we computed the descriptive statistics for male and female teacher's verbal and non- verbal immediacy as perceived by EFL learners, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive results of Male and female teacher's verbal and non- verbal immediacy as perceived by EFL learners

Dependent Variable	Gender	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Verbal Immediacy	Male	72.967	.280	72.415	73.519
	Female	73.630	.245	73.148	74.113
None Verbal Immediacy	Male	53.945	.233	53.485	54.405
	Female	53.992	.204	53.589	54.394

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Table 2 displays that EFL learners had a higher perception of their female teachers (73.63) compared to male teachers' VI (M= 72.96) and slightly higher levels of NVI for females (M = 53.99) compared to males (M = 53.94).

To test the significance of gender differences, the assumptions underlying the MANOVA including homogeneity of covariance matrices and homogeneity of variances were checked. Then, a multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA) was run. Table 3 presents the results of the MANOVA.

Table 3. Gender differences in Verbal and Non-Verbal Immediacy results

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis DF	Error DF	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.999	137035.54	2	207	.000	.999
	Wilks' Lambda	.001	137035.54	2	207	.000	.999
	Hotelling's Trace	1324.0	137035.54	2	207	.000	.999
	Roy's Largest Root	1324.0	137035.54	2	207	.000	.999
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.015	1.593	2	207	.206	.015
	Wilks' Lambda	.985	1.593	2	207	.206	.015
	Hotelling's Trace	.015	1.593	2	207	.206	.015
	Roy's Largest Root	.015	1.593	2	207	.206	.015

As presented in Table 3, the MANOVA results (F (2, 207) = 1.59, p > .05, partial η^2 = .015 representing a weak effect size) indicated that there were not any significant gender differences in Iranian EFL teachers' verbal and nonverbal immediacy as perceived by learners attending their classes which provided the answer for the first research question.

In addition, to answer the second research question, which addressed whether EFL learners taught by male and female teachers differed significantly in terms of their communication apprehension (CA). Initially the participants' descriptive statistics for the CA data were computed and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Gender differences in Communication Apprehension results

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
Communication Apprehension	Male	91	57.07	2.585	.271
	Female	119	56.76	2.473	.227

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As shown in Table 4, the male (M=57.07, SD=2.58) and female (M=56.76, SD=2.47) had roughly equal means on CA which based on McCroskey" (1982) PRCA, was a moderate level for both groups.

To investigate the significance of the observed difference, we ran, an independent-samples t-test on the male and female teachers' CA scores. Table 5 displays that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was retained on CA; the non-significant results of the Levene's test (F=.541, p> .05) indicated that the two groups were homogenous in terms of their variances on CA. The results of independent samples t-test; (t (208) =.858, p> .05, r^2 =.059 representing a weak effect size) indicated that EFL learners taught by male and female teachers did not differ significantly in terms of their CA.

Table 5. T-test results for Communication Apprehension

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Std. Error Dif.	95% Confidence Interval of the Dif.	
									Lower	Upper
	Equal variances assumed	.541	.463	.858	208	.392	.301	.351	-.391	.994
	Equal variances not assumed			.853	189.2	.395	.301	.353	-.396	.998

The r-effect size should be interpreted based on these criteria; .10 = Weak, .30 = Moderate, and .50 = Large (Field, 2018). The Last research question stated whether EFL students' perception of their male and female teachers' immediate behavior could predict their communication apprehension (CA). The researcher ran a linear regression in order to predict learners' CA through EFL teachers' immediate behavior; however, due to the weak contribution of the predictors; i.e. verbal and non-verbal immediacy, the regression model did not converge. As displayed in Table 6, the verbal and non-verbal immediacy could predict .6 percent of learners' CA (R = .079, R^2 = .006). The verbal immediacy was excluded on the second step without any change in percentage of prediction. Finally, the non-verbal immediacy was excluded on the third step to leave the regression model with no predictor. Based on these results, it was found that EFL learners' perception of their teachers' immediate behavior could not predict their CA.

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Table 6. linear regression of learners' CA

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.079[a]	.006	-.003	2.525
2	.079[b]	.006	.001	2.519
3	.000[c]	.000	.000	2.520
a. Predictors: (Constant), None Verbal Immediacy, Verbal Immediacy				
b. Predictors: (Constant), None Verbal Immediacy				
c. Predictor: (constant)				

Discussion

The findings related to the first research question investigating the significance of the differences of the verbal and nonverbal immediacy of the Iranian EFL teachers in term of their gender was found to be nonsignificant which was in line with Rowden and Carlson's (1996) study in which no difference was found for immediacy of the teachers across gender.

The results also revealed that female teachers were perceived to have slightly more immediate behavior (M= 73.63) than male teachers (M= 72.96). The justification for such finding could be that women talk more than men do and use communication to build and maintain relationship. In Rowden and Carlson's (1996) study female instructors received *higher* and female students with male instructors rated the course *lower* than any other gender grouping.

The findings also revealed that the mean score of the verbal immediacy of both male and female teachers was perceived to be slightly higher than that of the nonverbal one which could be justified in terms of the established religious and cultural regulations dominating the classroom environments. That is, teachers, especially if they are of different gender from that of their students, must keep their distance which explains why in general the mean score of nonverbal immediacy was lower regardless of their gender.

In case of classes with the same student-teacher gender, female teachers were perceived to have slightly more nonverbal immediacy which was supported and rejected by some studies found in literature. A number of studies (Burgoon, Buller, Grandpre, & Kalbfleisch, 1998) proved that females are better able to express themselves in emotional and nonverbal interactions. According to Eagly (1995), females smile more than males do. However, this result was in contrast to Coats's (1996) study confirming that females are more likely to communicate immediacy verbally than males. In the same vein, Christophel (1990) concluded that males were more likely than females to use verbal immediacy in the classroom. The findings are not also consistent with the study of

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Carrell and Menzel (1999), who examined students' perceived learning, willingness to talk in class, and teacher verbal and nonverbal immediacy with reference to both teacher and student gender.

Regarding the second research question, the results of the independent samples t-test indicated that EFL learners' CA level did not differ significantly being taught either by male or female teachers. That is to say, participants were found to have moderate level of CA in male (M= 57.07) and female (M= 56.76) teachers' classes which was roughly equal regardless of their teachers' gender. The results could be explained by Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Bandura (1986). This interpersonal theory provides a psychological model of behavior that is shaped and controlled by internal disposition or environmental influences (Bandura, 2001). According to Bandura (1986) there are six variables that affect or intervene during the process of behavior change. These variables can be associated with communication apprehension and include: (1) Self-efficacy; (2) Self-Control; (3) Outcomes expectations; (4) Reinforcements; (5) Observational learning; and (6) Emotional coping, the last of which is applicable one in the current study. The emotional coping variable is directly related to the participants' developmental stages. The age range of the young adult participants which was beyond the puberty could justify not having a high level of CA; however, the moderate level of CA found among them could be related to other factors involving a language learning and not the teachers' gender. These findings of this study are in line with the findings of Zhang (2005) who found that there is not significant difference between learners' CA and their perceived nonverbal teacher immediacy.

Data analyses regarding the third research question revealed that the teachers' immediate behavior could not predict the participants' CA level. Similarly, Gendrin and Rucker (2009) found no relationship between immediacy and perceived cognitive and affective learning outcomes across gender. However, nonverbal immediacy was more predictive of learning outcomes. The findings of this study are not also consistent with the findings of Frymier (1993) who found that a teacher behavior such as immediacy has a positive impact on highly apprehensive students in the classroom.

According to Mehrabian's (1971) "approach-avoidance theory" in the concept of immediacy, people tend to approach those whom they feel at ease with and get away from the ones whom they dislike. Richmond, McCroskey, and Hickson (2008) also reported that teachers can minimize

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students' anxiety, stress, and negative reactions through exhibiting verbal and non-verbal immediate actions. The nonsignificant results gained in the current study could be justified by the level of the familiarity of the participants with their teachers as they had been together for two successive terms. The moderate level of apprehension could be related to the experience of leaning the new language, but their familiarity with their teachers and their immediacy did not affect their CA level.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study some conclusions can be drawn. Although no significant difference was found between teachers' gender and their immediacy, or teachers' gender and participants' CA, when Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), is extended to communication apprehension in the school context, it would seem that personal and environmental issues are important to explain when and why behavior exists. Any communication barrier especially CA should be identified at early stages which puts extra burden on the teachers' shoulders to be mindful of any type of anxiety and design positive solutions or teaching strategies or even be cautious of their immediate behavior not to send any negative signals in the process of teaching and learning.

The Social Cognitive Theory strives to equip self-regulated learners for the education context (Bandura, 1991). According to Zimmerman (1990), self-regulation refers to the capacity to recognize one's ability by observing one's own behavior, evaluating its effectiveness and using that information to adapt behavior that may be more conducive to the learning situation. If the latter is done, learners' behavior may be more positive without anxiety and insecurity towards oral communication in the second language classroom.

The present study can have some implications for teachers. They need to show that they understand the learners' circumstances and provide support to these learners. Clear teaching

may reduce apprehension level by making material easier to assimilate (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001). If learners are comfortable with the teacher, the content and the classroom setting, they will not experience a high level of communication apprehension while mastering the learning material and may have positive attitude toward the course.

Finally, the affective filter hypothesis embodies Krashen's (1981) opinion that various affective variables play a role in second language acquisition. According to Krashen, the affective

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filter can be prompted by many different variables including anxiety, low confidence, low motivation and debilitating anxiety, which in turn impede language acquisition. The affective side of learners is probably one of the strongest factors in language success or failure (Rashidi, Yamini, & Shafiei,2011). Teachers can help this by creating a positive atmosphere in the class, working more on their positive immediacy and showing understanding for the apprehension learners bring to the classroom.

The findings of this study may also add strength to the ELT educational field and urge SLA researchers to continue with the recommendations for building relationships with learners to improve learning and decrease their CA. Although a multitude of other variables may affect the interaction between students and teachers, teachers' verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors could be fruitful tools in motivating these learners, thereby enhancing teacher effectiveness, regardless of teacher gender.

Based on the findings of the study, two main recommendations for future research can be made. It is recommended that future studies conducted to determine how student and teacher's perceptions of immediacy change over time. Thus, there is a need to conduct a longitudinal research in this area. Another suggestion would be future replications of this study across proficiency levels to find out the extent to which learners' proficiency levels might interact with their perceptions of their teachers' behavior and their CA.

The findings of this study corroborated the findings of the previous studies in this realm of research. Nonetheless, the presence of some inevitable limitations would decrease generalizations of the findings. One main limitation of this study could be the small sample size due to the limited number of accessible classes for conducting the research. As a result, the findings of the study should be generalized with caution to other pedagogical contexts.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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