

## The Relationship between Nonverbal Communications, Social Skill and Social Anxiety among Students of Payam-E Noor University of Tehran

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**ABSTRACT**— The present study is aimed to investigate the relationship between nonverbal communications, social skill and social anxiety among students of Payam-e Noor University of Tehran. It is a descriptive study based on correlation. Sample population was 384 students chosen randomly. In order to gather information, Rossip and Hall's 81 item questionnaire of nonverbal relations has been used. Moshaveri's 38 item questionnaire has been used for social anxiety and Foster and Inderbitzen's a 39 item questionnaire has been applied in order to determine social skills. Data were analyzed by SPSS 20 using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient. Results suggest that nonverbal relation has been 3.1% low, 64.1% average and 32.8% high. Social anxiety has been 34.4% low, 58.1% average and 7.6% high. Social skill has been 2.1% low, 89.3% average and 8.6% high. There is a significant relation between nonverbal associations of students and social skill and anxiety. There is a significant relation between social skill of students and their social anxiety.

**KEYWORDS:** nonverbal relations, social skill, social anxiety, students

### Introduction

Socialization is a process in which norms, skills, motivations, attitudes and behaviors are shaped so that the current or future role of the individuals will be acceptable in the society. This process begins from the very birth of a baby when s/he is dressed and put into the cradle or a specific reaction is shown to her/his cries. There are certain people, groups and social organizations that play a pivotal role in this process including parents, siblings, teachers and coaches who spend a large portion of their time to present values and direct or change the behavior of children. Organizations such as school, mosques, and various state and non-state agencies that are responsible for the task of cultural transmission, as well as mass media, are powerful forces in shaping attitudes and behaviors of children (Cartledge and Mibourne, 2006). One of the crucial factors in social development is non-verbal knowledge and skills. In social interactions, people often complain about their undesirable non-verbal behavior. If we consider, for example, the interaction between people, we repeatedly hear statements like these: 'I did not like the way she looked at me', 's/he looked down upon me', 'her/his facial expressions indicated that s/he was not trustworthy', 'his/her gestures are infused with pride', 'his tone was impolite', 'I feel threatened talking to him because he stands too close to me'. At this point, we may wonder, 'Why couldn't I convince others to work with me?' 'Why couldn't I sympathize with others?' 'Why couldn't I convey my demands to others?' 'Or why can't I understand others' feelings or communicate my feelings to others?' Here, we come to notice the deficiency of our social interaction, wondering if our social behavior is not favorable or appropriate (Baniasadi and D'souza, 2009). Besides its role in protecting life and helping man to seek assistance from others, communication underlies social activities and marks beginning introduction of social life. However, any kind of human communication is not initiated unless out of the need for social interaction. Humans have developed different methods for establishing relationships with others, including the development of language and non-verbal methods such as facial expressions, body position or posture and gestures. Each of these methods can convey part of the intended information and feelings of the speaker or interlocutor to another person or listener (Bolton, 2007). Thus, as Sajjadi (2010) concluded in his study, verbal and nonverbal communication could influence social skills of the people. Children with social and communication skills would grow healthier and enjoy greater supportive and emotional resources. It eliminates the sensitivity, irritability and lack of self-confidence of the children, thereby helping them gain more respect and credit, enabling them to expose themselves to less risk in the complex and sophisticated world we live in. There are various theories about the acquisition of social skills among which the social learning theory has addressed this subject in details. From the perspective of social learning, Bandura believes that in addition to encouragement and punishment, role

models also affect the social behavior of children. Children acquire new social skills through imitation and observation (Amiri, 2007). We experience a host of relationships in our lives. For many of us, the first and foremost type of communication is our relationship with parents and other close relatives. As we grow, other relationships become important: dating, working, falling in love and the like are among everyday life events that involve interpersonal interactions and leave a great impact on our quality of life. We begin by investigating bond-making, i.e., our basic need to establish relationship with others, and then turn to some special relationships that may be of significance for us (Biyabangard, 2003). Although interpersonal relationship is among the greatest achievements of mankind, ordinary people are not capable of establishing a good relationship (Bolton, 2007). Human relationships are essential to satisfy our basic needs. Developing a positive and healthy relationship with others is the key to the growth and perfection of human beings. What we are today and what we will be in the future both depend on our relationship with others. Our relationships fabricate our behavior as a social being, contributing to the uniqueness of character, identity and sense of self (Afzalnia, 2004). Sometimes we should not express our intention in words as people may see it as a sign of pretension, rudeness or detachment. Knowledge of non-verbal communication helps the person send, receive, read and interpret the non-verbal messages, which is vital to developing intimacy and trust, establishing mutual understanding and maintaining social harmony. The lack of this knowledge prevents the person from receiving or sending appropriate messages from and to others. One's knowledge of non-verbal communication improves social performance and facilitates successful social relationships, allowing an individual to both understand desires, needs, feelings and expectations of others and convey his to them (Hargie et al, 2007). When nonverbal communications of people are enhanced, their social skills, i.e., how they connect to people and the way they express their needs and desires is also improved, which can lead to relieved social anxiety (Richmond, 2009). One of the characteristics of anxious people is that they worry too much about their mistakes, and even when they do well, they improperly evaluate their performance (Banerjee, 2005). It seems that the characteristics of individuals with anxiety disorders is comparable with the features of perfectionists such as having high standards with critical evaluations (Frost, 2002). Social anxiety, which is described as a distressing experience, is one of the factor interrupting the growth process and social development of the people, thwarting the flourishing of talents and the consolidation of their existence. This phenomenon, which is relatively common in adolescence, can have an inhibiting effects on the efficiency and dynamism of adolescents and the youth, destroying their social and personal functioning in different fields (Butler, 2011). According to DSMIII, social anxiety characterizes the persistent fear of a situation in which the person may be subject to people's curiosity, worrying to behave in a way that brings humiliation or embarrassment for him. According to Mehrabizadeh (2008) the person suffering from social anxiety are not willing to start a relationship with others and attempt to avoid any situation that may subject him to the judgment of others with an unusual sense of fear and sustainability. Laden and Taylor posit that social anxiety disorder is an interpersonal condition in which anxiety interferes with developing personal relations with others. These people have limited social relationships and are less likely to marry those without anxiety disorders (Safizadeh, 2007). Social anxiety is the most important anxiety disorder and the third largest psychological problem after depression and alcoholism. However, unlike other mental problems, it has not been properly addressed by psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and counselors (Maleki, 2010). Given that one of the main objectives of higher education is to flourish students' talents, enhancing students' social skills may lead to lower social anxiety. Sajjadi (2010) found that there was not any significant relationship between non-verbal communication and social skills. In the same line of research, the relationship between non-verbal communications, compatibility and social anxiety was insignificant. Accordingly, it can be argued that those with high nonverbal communication may also have higher social skills and be more competent in developing social relationships than those who have low verbal communication skills. Further, those with high verbal communication skills may have lower social anxiety. Hence, the relationship between non-verbal communication of individuals and social skills and social anxiety is a relatively new subject that the researcher is going to study. Modern world is characterized by increasing growth of technology and human knowledge that is accumulatively on rise. It appears that this process has caused some tensions in human life. Generally, such tensions cannot be avoided, but we need to learn how to deal with them (Rich, 2007). Thus, teaching social skills to children, who are in fact the future adults, is of paramount importance. Social development and accountability are the most important goals of any society that require special attention by the authorities, planners and even ordinary people. This issue is not only involved in social adjustment of same age groups, family and social groups, but also acts as an important factor that can be positively correlated with educational activities and accomplishments of the learners (Fathi Azar, 2004). Great emphasis on the theoretical aspects, which is prevalent in our education and universities, due to lack of regard for social and psychological aspects of growth, has degraded the efficiency and effectiveness of education programs and stimulated behavioral and personal in people (Aslankhani, 2006). If people fail to achieve social development in parallel with physical and intellectual development, they will not be ready to deal with life issues when engaging in public life. They are even unable to take advantage of their education. Moreover, moral development of people is highly dependent on their social development, acting as an indicator of their interest in prevailing norms and values. Psychologists believe that morality is a social issue based on the virtues preferred by the society (Shoarinejad, 2010). Children who have acquired enough social skills are more successful in forging relationships with their peers and learning in educational environments than children who lack these skills. Further, studies have shown the positive effects of teaching social skills in the life of individuals and reducing behavioral problems (Tabesh, 2007). Based on the theoretical principles presented in this study, it

seems that nonverbal communication is a new subject which has been taken up by some psychology scholars, though few studies have addressed this issue in Iran. Also, social anxiety and lack of social skills is a common issue among people, especially students, which is expanding in some cases. According to the studies, a variety of factors can contribute to these issues, which need to be identified by the researchers. Moreover, the factors involved in reducing social anxiety and promoting social skills need to be studied so that it may help improve the situation of students in relation to these two important variables in developing social relations. Given the little background about the impact of nonverbal communication on social issues, the author decided to study the relationship of nonverbal communication with both social anxiety and social skills hoping that it may help identify the factors that reduce the former and improve the latter. This suggests the importance of this study among students.

### **Method**

The present study, given its topic, objective and assumptions, is cross-sectional and draws on correlation method. This study is correlational as it measures the relationship between the nonverbal communication, social skills and social anxiety among students of Payam-e Noor University. The population of the study consisted all students of PNU branch of Tehran, which included 3800 students in 2011-2012 academic year, all of whom had been selected through random sampling. In this method, students were selected randomly for data collection. Considering the research questions and methods, Cochran formula was used to obtain the sample, which required a minimum number of 348 samples.

The following questionnaires were used for data collection.

#### **A) Nonverbal communication test**

The paper and pencil test measured the non-verbal knowledge of the students from semantic and pragmatic perspectives. This test, which was designed by Rosip & Hall (2004) in Boston University, includes 81 items. The respondents need to choose true or false response for each item and the total score is calculated based on the sum of true answers. High score on the test indicates high level of nonverbal knowledge while low score indicates the reverse. The subjects' scores ranged between 0-81. Discriminant validity and construct validity of the test was confirmed by its designer. Also, the reliability of the test was calculated by Cronbach's alpha (0.89). In 2009, the test was standardized by Baniasadi and Mortazavi, with the final format including 55 items out of original 81 items, and the test reliability was calculated by Cronbach's alpha (0.69). In this study, test reliability calculated by Cronbach's alpha was 0.91.

#### **B) Social Anxiety Questionnaire (spI)**

The questionnaire, which was designed in 2001 to measure social anxiety, consists of 38 items out of which 15 items are based on Moshaveri's Social Phobia Inventory questionnaire (2001) and the rest are based on clear and valid criteria of social anxiety. The test is in form of 5-point Likert (originally with a score of "0" to "4" for high score). The total score of 38 items of the questionnaire, as the value of the variable (social anxiety), can range from 0 to 152. The content validity of this questionnaire has been confirmed by several researchers and its reliability was measured by Moshaveri using Cronbach's alpha (0.83 %). In another study titled as "a comparison of recognition of the memory or the pack of social anxiety" which was carried out by Zare et al on 50 students, the value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.77 %. In this study, test reliability calculated by Cronbach's alpha was 0.94.

#### **C) The Teenage Inventory of Social Skills (TISS)**

The Teenage Inventory of Social Skills, which was designed by Inderbizen and Foster (1992), contains 39 items each with 5 alternatives. The respondents need give their responses on a range of statements from "it is not true at all" to "it is always true". The statements of this questionnaire encompass both positive and negative behaviors. Each statement consists of six options. In positive options, the scores distribution is as follows: "it is not true (0), it is rarely true (1), it is somehow true (2), it is partly true (3), it is often true (4) and it is always true (five). In the negative options, the scoring is reverse. As to the assessment of social skills, the respondent whose total score is above average have high social skills while those below average have low social skills. It should be noted that the score of 98 has been set as the mean score based on test standard. The reliability of these items was reported 0.90 by Foster (1990). Convergent validity of Inderbizen and Foster's questionnaire has been analyzed in a variety of ways including its comparison with self-assessment data, peer assessment and sociometric data and its diagnostic validity was measured by Inderbizen and Foster through examining the correlation between social skills and social desirability scores, socioeconomic status and other paper and pencil tools. The results suggest that the questionnaire has acceptable convergent and discriminant validity (Doran, 2001). The reliability of this questionnaire was reported 0.71 and 0.68 by Amin (1999) for second grade female students in relation to positive and negative statements respectively. As to the positive part of the questionnaire, the reliability coefficient was measured by Cronbach's alpha (80.71) and as to the negative part, this value was 80.51 (Doran, 2001). In this study, the test reliability calculated by Cronbach's alpha was 0.85.

### **Results**

Table 1: the score of nonverbal communication variable was measured by calculating 55 items of nonverbal communication questionnaire. To describe these variables, the scores were divided into three groups of low, medium and high scores. Of 384 students surveyed, the nonverbal communication score was low for 12 (3.1%), medium for 246 (64.1) and high for 126 (32.8).

**Table 1:** Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics of non-verbal communication

Nonverbal communication	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range of score
Low	12	3.1	32.83	7.52	-0.125	-0.559	11-53
medium	246	64.1					
high	126	32.8					
Total	384	100					

Table 2: the scores of social anxiety were obtained by calculating the sum score of 38 items of social anxiety questionnaire, and to describe the range of scores, they were divided into three groups of low, medium and high scores. Of 384 students surveyed, the social anxiety score was low for 132 (34.4%), medium for 223 (58.1%) and high for 29 (7.6 %).

**Table 2:** Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics of social anxiety

Social anxiety	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Range of score	Kurtosis	Skewness	Standard deviation	Mean
low	132	34.4	0-132	-0.019	-0.232	26.95	32.63
medium	223	58.1					
high	29	7.6					
Total	384	100					

Table 3: the scores of social skills were obtained by calculating the sum score of 39 items of social skill questionnaire, and to describe this variable, scores were divided into three groups of low, medium and high scores. Of 384 students surveyed, the social anxiety score was low for 8 (2.1%), medium for 343 (89.3%) and high for 33 (8.6 %).

**Table 3:** Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics of social skills

Social Skill	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Range of score	Kurtosis	Skewness	Standard deviation	Mean
low	8	2.1	53-158	1.88	0.833	13.29	88.51
medium	343	89.3					
high	33	8.6					
Total	384	100					

Table 4: Data analysis by Spearman test shows that the correlation coefficient between two variables of nonverbal communication and social anxiety of college students is 0.173 with a pvalue (significance) of 0.001 which is smaller than the significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Thus, the null hypothesis,  $H_0$ , which indicates the lack of any correlation, is rejected at this level. As a result, there is a significant relationship between the nonverbal communication of students and their social anxiety. In addition, the negative value of correlation coefficients and the slope of fitted line show the inverse relationship between these two variables, that is, the higher is the non-verbal communication, the higher will be social anxiety. Further, the coefficient of determination between two variables is 0.05 ( $r^2 = 0.05$ ). In other words, 5 percent of variation is shared between two variables (5 percent of students' social anxiety variations is explained by nonverbal communication).

**Table 4:** Statistics of Spearman correlation test concerning the relationship between students' nonverbal communication and their social anxiety.

Variable	Social anxiety				
	Spearman		$r^2$	existence of relationship	type of relationship
Test	Correlation coefficient	Significance			
nonverbal communications	0.255	0.000	0.05	Positive	reverse

Table 5: the analysis of data using Spearman test shows that the correlation coefficient between two variables of nonverbal communication and social skills of the students is 0.255 with a p- value (significance) of 0.000, which is smaller than the significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Thus, the null hypothesis,  $H_0$ , which indicates the lack of any correlation, is rejected at this level.

Hence, there is a significant relationship between nonverbal communication of students and their social skills. Further, the positive value of correlation coefficient and slope of the fitted line indicates the direct relationship between these two variables. In other words, the higher is the nonverbal communication, the higher will be the social skill. Moreover, the coefficient of determination between two variables is 0.05 ( $r^2 = 0.05$ ); that is, 5 percent of variation is shared between two variables (5 percent of students' social skill variations is explained by nonverbal communication).

**Table 5:** Statistics of Spearman correlation test concerning the relationship between students' nonverbal communication and their social skill.

Variable Test	Spearman		Social Skill		
	Correlation coefficient	Significance	$r^2$	existence of relationship	type of relationship
nonverbal communications	0.255	0.000	0.05	positive	direct

Table 6 the analysis of data using Spearman test shows that the correlation coefficient between two variables of social anxiety and social skills of the students is - 0.27 with a p- value (significance) of 0.001, which is smaller than the significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Thus, the null hypothesis,  $H_0$ , which indicates the lack of any correlation, is rejected at this level. Hence, there is a significant relationship between social anxiety of students and their social skills. Further, the negative value of correlation coefficient and slope of the fitted line indicates the reverse relationship between these two variables. In other words, the higher is the social skill, the higher will be the social anxiety. Moreover, the coefficient of determination between two variables is 0.05 ( $r^2 = 0.05$ ); that is, 5 percent of variation is shared between two variables (5 percent of students' social anxiety variations is explained by their social skill).

**Table 6:** Statistics of Spearman correlation test concerning the relationship between students' social anxiety and their social skill.

Variable Test	Spearman		Social Skill		
	Correlation coefficient	Significance	$r^2$	existence of relationship	type of relationship
nonverbal communications	-0.27	0.000	0.054	Positive	reverse

**Conclusion**

The present study was aimed to investigate the relationship between nonverbal communications, social skill and social anxiety among students of Payam-e Noor University of Tehran. As you saw, we may conclude that only 33 percent of students possess high nonverbal communication. Thus, a large number of students have difficulty developing nonverbal communication and lack the necessary social skills, a finding that is consistent with the findings of Sajjadi (2010). Similarly, a huge number of students deliver a poor performance in connection with social communication through body language. However, about 34 percent of students have low social anxiety, which is in line with the findings of Maleki (2010) according to which 33% of students have low social anxiety. Therefore, it can be said that about 66 percent of students have medium and high social anxiety, which is indicative of anxious students in the society, especially anxiety in establishing social communication and participating in the society, which can negatively affect the development of proper communications in the society. As a result, attempts should be made to reduce this figure so that we can have more successful youths in the society. It is very important since people with social anxiety are concerned about confronting humiliating situations or acting inappropriately, making mistakes that subject them to others' judgment or being scrutinized by others and this reveals their physical symptoms. They tend to avoid opening or maintaining a conversation, speaking, doing something, eating, drinking or writing in front of others, meeting strangers, attending the social gatherings and talking on the phone; otherwise, they have to bear the considerable pressure and frustration of these situations. When facing these situations, they experience a spectrum of physical symptoms such as muscular contraction, blushing, increased heart rate, sweating and trembling, which may result in panic attacks. They tend to distance themselves from social event and engage in self-evaluation. Then, they use the inside information gathered from this self-concentration, like anxiety, and reach wrong conclusions about the images that others form about them in their mind. The study results show that only 9 percent of students have high social skills and the rest have average social skills, which reveal that their social skills are not high enough. These finding are somehow consistent with those of Arbabi (2012). Social skill is a talent that gives rise to behaviors that may be positively or negatively reinforced not behaviors that could be punished or silenced by others. These skills can bring about positive and successful results in people's relationship with others. A person equipped with social skills can select and present appropriate behaviors in a given time and situation. Thus, the training of social skills is inseparable from the

context in which the behavior takes place. As such, we need to take into account the social contexts when planning to teach these skills to people. That is, we should develop the ability to properly recognize the signals that indicate the state of individuals within a group and organize them accordingly. Such ability allow access to critical background information regarding the selection of appropriate behavior As the study results showed there is a reverse relationship between nonverbal communications of the students and their social anxiety. That is, individuals with high nonverbal communications skills demonstrate lower anxiety in social activities. These findings are consistent with the results of Richmond et al (2009) who concluded that people with high nonverbal communication skills were more successful in establishing healthy and proper relationship with others and demonstrated less anxiety. Accordingly, it can be said that nonverbal communication skills can reduce social anxiety. There is a direct and significant relationship between nonverbal communications of the students and their social skills. This is in line with the findings of Feldman et al (1991) who showed that the ability to interpret and understand non-verbal behavior of others both facilitated the perception of the emotional states of others and affected social interactions. Zoorabadi (2005) concluded that students' verbal and nonverbal communication was a predictor of their social growth and social skills. Baniasadi and Bagheri (2011) found that knowledge of nonverbal communication was significantly correlated with the social competence and social skills of students. Therefore, as the results of literature and the present study suggest, increased nonverbal communication of people improve their social skills and their ability in developing successful social relationship and those skilled at nonverbal communications are more successful at establishing healthy social relations. The results suggest that there is a significant and reverse relationship between students' social skills and their social anxiety. These results are compatible with findings which demonstrated there was a relationship between social anxiety and social and communicative skills. Further, they are consistent with the findings which showed people with social anxiety had low communicative and social skills. Accordingly, it can be argued that individuals with low social skills experience higher anxiety in establishing social relationship and at times even become socially reclusive. Conducting this study, we faced a series of problems, including lack of resources and lack of control over environmental factors regarding filling out the questionnaires. Based on the results, the following suggestions could be provided: for the fact that the community needs to become more knowledgeable, a greater emphasis should be placed on knowledge of non-verbal communications in schools and universities. As non-verbal communications need more interpretation than verbal communications, parents should learn to teach their children how to interpret body language. People in charge of education, including parents, universities and education department should try to teach social skills in groups or individually commensurate with individuals' age and education. Social skills training centers should be tailored to educate citizens with regard to Persian and Islamic culture of the Iranian society. We suggest conducting some more research with regard to effects of these variables and other factors such as self-confidence and social growth on social skills and anxiety.

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