Gestures: For the Efficiency of English as a Second Language (ESL) Teaching on Digital Platforms

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With the emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic as a massive international concern, a virtual teaching and learning environment was designed for all levels of education. As a novel experience for most Sri Lankan English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, online language learning has become a challenge due to the lack of attention, interaction, and engagement during the class. Previous studies revealed that the use of gestures, as a form of non-verbal communication, plays an important role in teacher-student interactions in the traditional classroom. The current study investigates the way teachers use gestures to enhance the efficiency of ESL teaching on digital platforms. Semi-structured interviews (using ten questions) with thirty ESL teachers (both government and non-government) in Sri Lanka and observations of five zoom classes were conducted to discover the way of using gestures in ESL teaching in the virtual classroom setting and to identify the ESL learners' reactions to the gestures used in remote teaching. The results demonstrated that ESL teachers' use of hand gestures in teaching on digital platforms influenced student comprehension, especially in instructional discourse. Further, according to the results, gestures can be identified as an effective teaching strategy in the virtual teaching setting as they make the learning more active, engaging, and comprehensible. Thus, the use of gestures is believed to make the virtual learning environment of the ESL classroom more encouraging and inviting. The study offers pedagogical implications for ESL teachers to apply more effective gestures in their remote teaching, to facilitate communication, understanding, and participation of ESL learners.

Key words: digital platforms, English as a Second Language learners, English as a Second Language teaching, gestures, non-verbal

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