

Subconscious Facial Expressions Used by Social Studies Teachers During History Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This study examines social studies teachers' awareness of subconscious facial expressions during history instruction, the emotions conveyed through these mimics, and the effects on students, focusing on classroom interaction and educational outcomes. In addition to a qualitative, phenomenological design and semi-structured interviews with 25 teachers in Malatya, the study addresses the limitations of self-report, integrates recent literature, and provides a nuanced discussion of findings. The results indicate that most teachers generally use facial expressions and gestures automatically and unconsciously; they express emotions such as excitement, sadness, pride, and surprise distinctly through facial expressions. Students' responses to teachers' facial expressions are mostly increased attention and emotional engagement. Facial expressions and gestures enhance comprehensibility, memorability, and student-teacher emotional bonds. The results, contextualized in recent educational psychology, suggest subconscious facial expressions can be a supportive tool in history instruction but must be evaluated within the boundaries of subjective teacher self-assessment.

Key words: Subconscious Facial Expressions, Social Studies Teachers, History Instruction, Historical Literacy

INTRODUCTION

A significant portion of the information and stimuli we encounter in daily life is emotional in nature, and often, these are not directly related to the behavioral goals we are trying to achieve at that moment. Nevertheless, people must continue to behave flexibly and adaptively amid this multitude of emotional and goal-irrelevant information coming from their environment. As emphasized by Watanabe and Haruno (2015), human behavior is based on the ability to quickly adapt to changing circumstances, and a substantial part of this adaptation process occurs outside of conscious awareness.

However, most studies on emotion processing focus on neuropsychological aspects, whereas in classroom settings, the influence of subconscious facial expressions on communication, teacher awareness, and learning is underexplored (Hargreaves, 1998; Prosen & Vitulic, 2014; Stojanovic et al., 2021).

When considering real-world social environments, most of the signals we encounter; such as, a brief expression on someone's face, a change in tone of voice, or a bodily gesture, are often not directly related to our immediate goals or focus of attention. However, whether we are aware of them or not, these signals play a decisive role in shaping our behavior (Watanabe & Haruno, 2015).

Social brain theories also suggest that most social signals from our surroundings are processed automatically and

largely unconsciously. Such automatic processing enables individuals to respond rapidly to environmental changes and avoid missing potential threats or opportunities (Tamietto & de Gelder, 2010; Watanabe & Haruno, 2015).

In the educational context, especially in history lessons where emotional narratives and collective memory are central, teachers' subconscious facial expressions and gestures may play a crucial role in building classroom atmosphere, stimulating emotional engagement, and supporting the learning process (Bakadorova & Raufelder, 2018; Zembylas, 2020).

Emotional facial expressions and gestures are among the fundamental building blocks of human social life. From an evolutionary perspective, the ability of humans to quickly and mostly automatically perceive the facial expressions of others has provided an advantage in terms of social adaptation and survival. This phenomenon is not limited to facial expressions that are directly and consciously perceived; research has shown that facial expressions and gestures can influence individuals even in the absence of conscious awareness (Tamietto & de Gelder, 2010).

For example, in the classic studies by Murphy and Zajonc (1993), subliminally presented happy or angry facial expressions of which participants were not consciously aware caused significant changes in participants' evaluative decisions. This finding indicates that emotional expressions

can affect attitudes and judgments even when they are not cognitively recognized (Murphy & Zajonc, 1993). Similarly, the study by Almeida and colleagues (2013) demonstrated that emotional facial expressions can shape evaluative processes even in the absence of conscious recognition. These studies reveal that emotional information processing often occurs automatically and at an unconscious level (Almeida et al., 2013).

From a neuroscientific perspective, similar results have been obtained. In a brain imaging study conducted by Whalen and colleagues (1998), fearful facial expressions that participants could not consciously perceive led to amygdala activation. The amygdala is a brain region that plays a central role, particularly in processing threat-related and emotional stimuli. This finding demonstrates that emotional facial expressions not only remain outside of our conscious awareness, but can also automatically trigger emotional brain circuits (Whalen et al., 1998; Kim & Blake, 2005; Kouider & Dehaene, 2007).

The unconscious effects of facial expressions have been observed not only at the brain level but also behaviorally. In the study by Dimberg, Thunberg, and Elmehed (2000), it was found that participants responded with emotion-congruent reactions in their own facial muscles to emotional facial expressions they perceived unconsciously. In other words, even without conscious awareness, individuals can respond to another person's facial expression such as smiling back or frowning in a manner appropriate to the emotion displayed (Dimberg et al., 2000).

While neuropsychological research provides important insights, current perspectives emphasize the need to relate these findings to pedagogical processes, such as teacher-student emotional dynamics and instructional effectiveness (Frenzel et al., 2021; Mottet & Beebe, 2006).

All these findings reveal that the processing of facial expressions can occur rapidly, automatically, and, in most cases, outside the level of conscious awareness. This points to the existence of automatic information processing, largely unnoticed by us, which underlies processes such as emotional contagion, empathy, and group dynamics in social interactions (Tamietto & de Gelder, 2010). The studies presented in the literature strongly support the idea that the processing of social signals and emotional reciprocity are integral parts of human nature.

During everyday social interactions, we often respond to the emotional expression that appears on another person's face with a similar facial expression of our own, quickly and automatically, without even being aware of it. Because these reactions usually occur outside of our conscious control, this phenomenon is described in the literature as "subconscious mimicry" (Goldman & Sripada, 2005; Niedenthal et al., 2001; Oberman et al., 2007). That is, when we observe a facial expression in another person, similar movements simultaneously occur in our own facial muscles, and this process is generally not consciously noticed.

Subconscious mimicry is not only regarded as an involuntary motor response, but also plays a role in understanding the emotions of others and establishing empathy. In social

relationships, we need these automatic facial reactions to better comprehend the emotional state of the person in front of us and to develop appropriate responses. However, debates continue regarding the underlying processes of subconscious mimicry. According to one view, these reactions are entirely motor-oriented and arise independently of conscious awareness, preceding emotional processes (Goldman & Sripada, 2005). In other words, when a person observes the emotional expression of another, the same facial muscles are reflexively activated even before the emotion is consciously felt.

Another perspective suggests that facial mimicry is not merely a motor response; rather, it functions as an integral part of perceiving and understanding the emotional expression of the other person (Niedenthal et al., 2001; Oberman et al., 2007). According to this approach, when a facial expression is imitated, a similar emotional state is also triggered within the observer, and this internal experience facilitates the process of identifying and understanding the other person's emotion.

The main debate between these two approaches concerns the cause-and-effect relationship of facial mimicry: Are these reactions simply an automatic product of the motor system, or are they an indispensable step in the processes of emotional empathy and understanding? Research shows that these processes are not entirely independent of each other; on the contrary, facial mimicry is closely intertwined with emotional cognition (Oberman et al., 2007).

In classrooms, especially in social studies and history, teachers' subconscious mimicry may influence not only cognitive engagement, but also emotional resonance, empathy, and memory processes for students (Bakadorova & Raufelder, 2018; Frenzel et al., 2021). However, research focusing specifically on the classroom context and teacher perspectives is still limited.

The aim of this study is to examine social studies teachers' awareness of the subconscious mimicry they use during history instruction, to identify which emotions are predominantly conveyed through these expressions, and to investigate their effects on students. In addition, the role of teachers' subconscious facial expressions and gestures in enhancing lesson comprehensibility, memorability, and student interest constitutes a central focus of this research.

Research Objectives

Within this framework, the study aims to investigate:

- To what extent teachers consciously use facial expressions and mimicry while teaching history,
- Which emotions are most frequently conveyed through their mimicry,
- How students respond to teachers' facial expressions and gestures,
- The effects of subconscious mimicry on lesson comprehension and memorability,
- And how mimicry contributes to students' interest and participation in the lesson.

Accordingly, this study does not claim to fully resolve the complexities of emotional transmission in teaching, but

rather to shed light on the nuanced and often unintentional narrative dynamics that characterize history instruction. All findings should be evaluated in light of methodological limitations and the need for more diversified data sources.

METHOD

This research was carried out within the scope of a qualitative research methodology, specifically utilizing a phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences with subconscious mimicry in classroom settings (Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Qualitative studies allow phenomena to be explored in depth within their natural context, utilizing various methods such as observation, interviews, and document analysis for data collection (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

In this approach, the main focus is on the concepts shaped by individuals and the meanings they ascribe to these concepts (Merriam, 2013). Additionally, qualitative research involves the interpretative analysis of research questions, examining the meanings attributed to social phenomena. Data obtained in this process are analyzed thematically, through both deductive and inductive reasoning, while maintaining sensitivity to participants and their environments. Such an approach makes it possible to investigate and interpret data comprehensively and in detail (Creswell, 2013).

Within this study, the phenomenological design, a sub-type of qualitative research, was employed. Phenomenology seeks to gather information about certain phenomena by focusing on the lived experiences of individuals (Kocabıyık, 2016). Events, experiences, perceptions, concepts, and situations encountered in daily life can sometimes appear as phenomena whose meanings are not fully clear. The phenomenological design is therefore used to gain a deeper understanding of such phenomena. Drawing on the diversity and sources of personal experiences, phenomenology analyzes, evaluates, and compares these experiences. In doing so, it allows for the in-depth investigation of phenomena that are unknown or not fully understood, thereby expanding and deepening our comprehension (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2014).

To ensure transparency and rigor, the following procedures were implemented:

- Data collection was performed through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in quiet rooms at participants' schools, allowing for participant comfort and confidentiality. Each interview lasted between 25–40 minutes and was audio-recorded after obtaining informed consent.
- The interview form was developed through a review of the literature, then refined with input from three experts in social studies education and two practicing teachers. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit concrete experiences and reflections on subconscious facial expressions, the emotions conveyed, and their classroom impact.
- After each interview, field notes were taken to document nonverbal cues and contextual factors, contributing to data triangulation and trustworthiness.
- Upon transcription, both the lead researcher and an external qualitative methods expert independently coded the data using a hybrid approach, combining *a priori* (deductive) themes from theory and emergent (inductive) themes from the interviews. Codes were compared and refined through iterative discussion until consensus was reached, achieving a 93% inter-coder agreement (Miles & Huberman, 2016).

In the phenomenological approach, the primary data sources are typically individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Interviews are the main data collection tool in such studies, while observations may also be used as supplementary methods. Since phenomenology is a qualitative research method, its aim is not to produce generalizable or definitive conclusions, but rather to provide detailed and clear insights into the phenomena studied. Research in this field presents case examples based on specific experiences, supporting a deeper understanding of the issues addressed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

Participants

In this research, the convenient sampling technique one of the purposive sampling strategies was utilized. This approach enables the researcher to select individuals or situations that are readily accessible, thereby making the research process more efficient and manageable. Convenient sampling is often adopted when other sampling methods are less feasible, as it is both cost-effective and straightforward to implement (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011; Büyüköztürk, 2016). Accordingly, the study sample consisted of 25 middle school teachers, including 14 women and 11 men, all working in schools located in the central district of Malatya. The key criterion in the selection of participants was their ease of access.

The final number of participants was determined by the point of thematic saturation, where no new insights emerged from additional interviews. All participants were assigned pseudonyms (P1–P25) to ensure anonymity, and sociodemographic data are summarized in Table 1.

Data Collection Tool

In this study, a semi-structured interview form containing open-ended questions prepared by the researcher was used as the data collection method. In the process of developing the interview form, the first step was to review the relevant

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the teachers forming the working group

Characteristic	Description
Gender	14 female, 11 male
Age range	25-30 years
Professional experience	3-10 years
Education level	All teachers have at least a bachelor's degree, 9 teachers have a master's degree

literature and create a framework that included key points. Then, the validity of the interview form was ensured by seeking expert opinions. In this context, the opinions of three faculty members from the Department of Turkish and Social Sciences Education at İnönü University were consulted. In addition, two social studies teachers and one Turkish teacher also reviewed the questions. Necessary updates were made in line with the suggestions. After making the required revisions and additions, this framework was finalized into the interview form.

The questions expected to be answered in the interview form are as follows:

1. Do you think you are aware of your facial expressions and mimicry while teaching history?
2. Which emotions do you think you particularly convey through your facial expressions when explaining historical topics?
3. How do students respond to the facial expressions or gestures you display during your history lessons? Could you explain?
4. What are your thoughts on the impact of using subconscious facial expressions in the narration of historical events on the comprehensibility or memorability of the lesson?
5. Based on your observations, do you think the mimicry and gestures you use while teaching history increase students' interest in or participation in the lesson?

Data Collection and Analysis

This study was conducted with 25 middle school teachers working in central Malatya during the 2024–2025 academic year. During the research process, pre-scheduled interviews were held with the participants. The locations and times of the interviews were determined according to the participants' availability. Audio recordings were taken during the interviews in order to allow for detailed analysis. The data were analyzed using the content analysis method. In the analysis process, thematic categories were first created based on the research questions and theoretical framework. Then, the collected data were organized according to these categories. Finally, the data were presented with frequency values.

To ensure the reliability of the research and to eliminate potential individual biases during the coding of the data, the interview data were evaluated and coded independently by both the expert and the researcher (coders) conducting the study. Afterwards, these codings were compared, and the numbers of agreements and disagreements were identified to determine the level of inter-coder consistency. The reliability of the research was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994/2016) reliability formula: "reliability = number of agreements/(total number of agreements + disagreements)." According to the formula, the reliability value calculated for the study was determined as 93%. Since the level of agreement between coders was 93% in this study, it was concluded that the desired level of reliability had been achieved. According to Saban (2009), in qualitative research, when the agreement between expert and researcher evaluations is 90%

or above, the desired level of reliability is considered to be achieved.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings obtained from the research are presented and interpreted through tables.

Table 2 presents teachers' views regarding their awareness of using facial expressions and mimicry during history lessons.

- *I am aware that my facial expressions change especially when talking about exciting or sad events, and my students are also affected by this.* [P2, Female, Age 27, 5 years of experience]
- *Most of the time, I do not control my mimicry; sometimes when I smile or look surprised, my students look at me and react.* [P5, Male, Age 29, 6 years of experience]
- *I think my mimicry makes my narration more effective; for example, when I tell a story about a battle, my eyes widen or my tone of voice changes.* [P9, Female, Age 28, 7 years of experience]
- *I have observed that I use mimicry more during emotionally intense moments, which increases students' interest.* [P14, Female, Age 26, 4 years of experience]
- *I am not very aware of my own facial expressions; I only realize it later from my students' reactions.* [P20, Male, Age 30, 9 years of experience].

Some participants stated that they used their facial expressions and mimicry fully consciously (f=10) during narration. These teachers indicated that they were particularly aware of their mimicry when conveying important or emotional historical events and that they could observe the impact it had on students. Some participants (f=9) mentioned that they were partially aware of their mimicry; they reported noticing changes in their facial expressions, especially when emotions intensified during the flow of narration. However, this awareness is not constant and is generally limited to specific moments. Another prominent theme is the unconscious (automatic) use of mimicry (f=8); a majority of teachers stated that they did not consciously control their mimicry during narration and that their reactions usually occurred naturally. Participants expressed that their mimicry generally emerged spontaneously in accordance with the flow of the story or event. In the theme of the contribution of mimicry to narration (f=7), it was emphasized that facial expressions make lesson narration more lively and effective, contribute to increased student attention, and help students better understand the events being described. It was particularly

Table 2. Participants' opinions on "awareness of facial expressions and mimicry while teaching history"

Theme	Frequency (f)
Awareness	10
Partial awareness	9
Unconscious (automatic) use of mimicry	8
Contribution of mimicry to narration	7
Increase in mimicry during emotional narration	6
Low mimicry awareness/lack of control	5

noted that mimicry naturally arises during exciting, surprising, or dramatic events. The increase in mimicry during emotional narration ($f=6$) demonstrates that participants used their facial expressions more noticeably in moments of high emotional intensity, thereby eliciting empathy or interest from students. A small number of participants, on the other hand, stated that their mimicry awareness was low or that they had difficulty controlling their facial expressions ($f=5$). These teachers generally became aware of their mimicry through students' reactions and noted that they could hardly control these expressions during narration. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that social cues and emotional expressions often operate outside conscious awareness (Tamiotto & de Gelder, 2010; Bakadorova & Raufelder, 2018).

Table 3 shows which emotions are most frequently conveyed by teachers through mimicry in history lessons.

- *Especially when narrating historical victories, I reflect my feelings of excitement and pride through my facial expressions, and students can sense this.* [P3, Male, Age 28, 5 years of experience]
- *When discussing painful events, I cannot hide the sorrow and sadness on my face. Students can sense the gravity of the moment from my expression.* [P7, Female, Age 26, 4 years of experience]
- *When describing surprising events in history, I display my astonishment through my mimicry, which attracts the students' attention.* [P10, Female, Age 29, 7 years of experience]
- *While narrating hopeful developments or inspiring human stories, I notice that I smile and my face brightens up.* [P16, Female, Age 27, 6 years of experience]
- *Sometimes when talking about wars or injustices, anger or disappointment appears on my face, and I cannot help it.* [P21, Male, Age 30, 8 years of experience].

The emotion most frequently expressed by participants is excitement and enthusiasm ($f=14$); teachers stated that they especially convey these emotions through their facial expressions when telling about significant achievements, historical turning points, or inspiring stories. This increases students' interest in the lesson and supports the memorability of the content. Sadness ($f=11$) is observed on teachers' faces during historical moments such as wars, losses, or tragic events. Participants reported that it is difficult to hide the intensity of their emotions at these times and that their mimicry helps students better sense the gravity of the events. Pride ($f=9$) is another frequently expressed emotion, particularly during stories of national achievement, historical leaders, and social solidarity. Participants noted that students are able to perceive this emotion more effectively thanks to teachers' facial expressions and tone of voice. Surprise and amazement ($f=8$) are often conveyed through facial expressions when narrating unusual or unexpected aspects of historical events. Teachers emphasized that displaying surprise helps maintain students' attention. The theme of happiness ($f=5$) emerges when positive developments, periods of peace, or success stories are recounted and is conveyed through facial expressions. Anger or disappointment ($f=4$), on the other

hand, are less frequent but strong emotions that appear in facial expressions when talking about injustices, betrayals, or events with negative societal impacts. Overall, participants emphasized that their facial expressions and mimicry are extremely effective in conveying emotions to students, helping them to better understand the subject matter.

Teachers most frequently reported conveying excitement and enthusiasm (14), sadness (11), pride (9), surprise (8), happiness (5), and anger/disappointment (4) through mimicry. This aligns with studies showing the centrality of emotional narratives in history education and their role in enhancing engagement and empathy (Frenzel et al., 2021).

Table 4 presents findings regarding students' reactions to teachers' facial expressions and gestures.

- *When I show my excitement through my mimicry, students also pay more attention and better grasp the most important parts of the topic.* [P1, Female, Age 25, 3 years of experience]
- *When I talk about a sad event, students react to the expression on my face by becoming sad or silent themselves.* [P6, Male, Age 27, 4 years of experience]
- *Sometimes, when I make a joke with my gestures, there is laughter in the classroom, and the lesson environment becomes more enjoyable.* [P9, Female, Age 28, 7 years of experience]
- *There are students who imitate me; sometimes they even start using my mimicry themselves.* [P15, Female, Age 29, 8 years of experience]
- *When I display intense emotions, some shy students may become more withdrawn or avoid eye contact.* [P22, Male, Age 30, 9 years of experience].

The most frequently observed reaction among participants was attention ($f=15$). Teachers emphasized that when mimicry and gestures were used, students listened more attentively, and eye contact and focus increased during the

Table 3. Participants' opinions on "emotions conveyed through facial expressions in history narration"

Theme	Frequency (f)
Excitement and enthusiasm	14
Sadness	11
Pride	9
Surprise and amazement	8
Happiness	5
Anger and disappointment	4

Table 4. Participants' opinions on "students' reactions to teachers' mimicry and gestures"

Theme	Frequency (f)
Attention	15
Emotional engagement	12
Creation of a fun and humorous atmosphere	7
Asking questions	6
Imitation	5
Embarrassment or shyness	3

most important parts of the lesson. Especially when emotions were incorporated into narration, students' motivation towards the lesson was reported to increase. Emotional engagement ($f=12$) was observed when students experienced similar emotions as those expressed by teachers through mimicry. It was noted that students shared these feelings during moments of sadness, joy, or excitement. The creation of a fun and humorous atmosphere ($f=7$) was observed especially when entertaining, exaggerated, or humorous mimicry was used, making the lesson environment more cheerful and sincere. This also helps students enjoy the lesson more and develop a closer relationship with their teacher. Asking questions ($f=6$) refers to students' increased curiosity as a result of mimicry and gestures, leading them to ask more questions, join discussions, or share their own ideas. Imitation ($f=5$) includes cases where students playfully imitate their teachers' gestures and mimicry or respond with a smile, which is considered a positive dynamic that strengthens teacher-student interaction. Embarrassment or shyness ($f=3$), which was less frequently mentioned, describes situations where some students avoid eye contact or become more withdrawn when confronted with intense emotional mimicry. Overall, participants stated that mimicry and gestures enhance students' participation in the lesson and contribute to the formation of an emotional bond between teacher and students. Such findings support prior literature indicating that teacher emotions can be contagious and shape classroom climate (Hargreaves, 1998; Mottet & Beebe, 2006).

Table 5 summarizes the participants' views on the effects of subconscious mimicry on students' comprehension and retention of the lesson.

- *When I explain with mimicry, my students remember the events better; sometimes, they recall my expressions even years later.* [P2, Female, Age 27, 5 years of experience]
- *I am able to concretize abstract concepts such as war, migration, or victory through my facial expressions, which makes it easier for children to understand.* [P8, Male, Age 26, 4 years of experience]
- *When I add emotion to an event, a bond is formed between me and the students, and they show more interest in the topic.* [P11, Female, Age 28, 6 years of experience]
- *When I use gestures and mimicry during the lesson, students are more willing to participate in the lesson.* [P16, Female, Age 27, 6 years of experience]
- *When I animate events while narrating, students are able to visualize the story in their minds more clearly.* [P23, Male, Age 30, 9 years of experience].

The most emphasized effect among participants was increasing memorability ($f=13$). Teachers stated that in lessons where subconscious mimicry and gestures were used, students retained what was taught for a much longer time, and when recalling events and concepts, they often also remembered the teacher's facial expressions. Concretizing abstract concepts ($f=12$) stands out as the use of mimicry and body language alongside verbal narration of historical events or concepts helps students better grasp complex or abstract

information. Especially for children, explanations with visible expressions facilitate the internalization of abstract concepts. The theme of emotional bond ($f=9$) indicates that mimicry creates an emotional bridge between teacher and student, enabling students to identify with the narrator and approach events with empathy. This also increases the impact and memorability of the lesson. Increasing participation ($f=7$) refers to the observation that in lessons where gestures and mimicry are used, students' interest and active participation rise, leading to more questions and discussion. The less frequently mentioned theme of animating the story ($f=5$) suggests that narration enriched with mimicry allows students to visualize scenes in their minds and animate events more vividly. Overall, participants emphasized that history lessons involving subconscious mimicry not only make the subject matter easier to understand but also help students retain information for a longer period. These results reinforce evidence that multimodal communication, including nonverbal cues, aids in both cognitive and emotional learning processes (Frenzel et al., 2021; Zembylas, 2020). Table 6 shows the findings regarding the impact of mimicry and gestures on students' interest and participation in the lesson.

- *At the end of the lesson, I often receive feedback from students like, 'Teacher, when I saw the expression on your face, I understood the story better.'* [P2, Female, Age 27, 5 years of experience]
- *When I use mimicry and gestures in class, interaction among students increases, and even shy students communicate more comfortably.* [P6, Male, Age 27, 4 years of experience]
- *When I use body language to approach students, the distance between us decreases and they feel more*

Table 5. Participants' opinions on "the effects of subconscious mimicry on lesson comprehensibility and memorability"

Theme	Frequency (f)
Increasing memorability	13
Concretizing abstract concepts	12
Emotional bond	9
Increasing participation	7
Animating the story	5

Table 6. Participants' opinions on "the effects of mimicry and gestures on students' interest and participation in lessons"

Theme	Frequency (f)
Direct feedback	12
In-class interaction	10
Reduced distance	7
Variability of impact across student profiles	6
Balance in narration	5
Excessive use	3

comfortable asking me questions. [P9, Female, Age 28, 7 years of experience]

- *Some students are highly influenced by mimicry, but with others, there is no noticeable effect; it's hard to have the same impact on everyone.* [P13, Male, Age 29, 8 years of experience]
- *Too much of anything can be harmful; exaggerated gestures and mimicry can make students laugh or cause them to lose focus.* [P15, Female, Age 29, 8 years of experience]
- *Sometimes, when I go overboard or use an inappropriate mimic, students may drift away from the topic, so I try to be balanced.* [P21, Male, Age 30, 8 years of experience].

A significant portion of participants emphasized that they receive direct feedback ($f=12$). Teachers reported that students explicitly stated that mimicry and gestures made the narration more understandable and memorable. Such feedback is seen as an indicator that the lesson has a real impact on students. The theme of in-class interaction ($f=10$) indicates that body language creates a more vibrant communication environment among students, and even shy or quiet students gradually become more willing to participate. It was observed that the use of mimicry made the classroom atmosphere warmer and more sincere. Reduced distance ($f=7$) refers to the idea that mimicry and gestures make the teacher appear more approachable and sincere in the eyes of students, creating a communication environment where students feel more comfortable asking questions and expressing their ideas. Variability of impact across student profiles ($f=6$) demonstrates that mimicry and gestures do not have the same degree of effect on all students. While some are highly influenced, others may remain unresponsive or uninterested in the lesson. The theme of balance in narration ($f=5$) draws attention to the necessity of avoiding excess, as well as the effective use of body language. Some teachers noted that if mimicry and gestures are used excessively, students may become distracted or lose their connection with the topic. Less frequently mentioned, excessive use ($f=3$) covers observations that overusing mimicry and gestures can make the narration seem caricature-like and may lead to misunderstandings among students. These findings underscore the need for nuanced use of nonverbal cues, as excessive or ill-timed gestures can disrupt attention (Bakadorova & Raufelder, 2018).

This study's unique contribution lies in documenting the largely subconscious and involuntary aspects of teacher mimicry in history instruction, and how these shape classroom emotional climate. While previous studies focus on deliberate teacher behaviors, this research highlights the spontaneous, affective dimensions of classroom interaction (Frenzel et al., 2021). However, reliance on teacher self-report, without triangulation from observation or student reports, limits the objectivity of the findings.

In light of recent work, it is suggested that subconscious mimicry and emotional gestures play a critical but complex role in learning and engagement. Future research should

utilize video analysis and student perspectives to validate and deepen these results (Bakadorova & Raufelder, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that subconscious mimicry by social studies teachers during history lessons enhances emotional engagement, attention, and learning, particularly by making abstract concepts more tangible and memorable. However, the impact varies by student, and excessive use can be counterproductive. The findings align with both neuroscientific and educational psychology literature, but their generalizability is limited by reliance on teacher self-assessment.

The findings indicate that while the facial expressions and mimicry teachers use during history narration are generally the product of automatic and subconscious processes, some teachers reported being aware of these processes and guiding them consciously. However, a significant portion of teachers stated that their mimicry largely emerges naturally during narration and is mostly unconscious. This finding parallels the evidence in the literature suggesting that social signals are largely processed outside of conscious awareness (Tamietto & de Gelder, 2010; Watanabe & Haruno, 2015).

The study showed that the emotions most frequently conveyed by teachers during history instruction are excitement, enthusiasm, sadness, pride, and surprise. It was found that mimicry and facial expressions become much more pronounced especially when narrating historical victories, social solidarity, wars, and tragic events, and that teachers mostly express these emotions naturally, without attempting to conceal them. This finding demonstrates that facial mimicry and emotional expressions are not only involuntary motor responses, but also play a fundamental role in empathy, emotional transmission, and social learning (Oberman et al., 2007; Niedenthal et al., 2001).

According to the participants, students' reactions to their teachers' mimicry and gestures were mostly positive, manifesting in increased attention, emotional engagement, the creation of a fun and humorous atmosphere, active questioning, and imitation of the teacher. It was found that mimicry increases students' interest and motivation, strengthens teacher-student interaction, and creates a warmer, more sincere, and interactive classroom environment. However, it was also observed that some students may become withdrawn in response to overly emotional mimicry or that classroom attention may be disrupted. This indicates that teachers should strive for balance when using mimicry and gestures.

The effect of subconscious mimicry on lesson comprehensibility and memorability was evaluated positively by the vast majority of participants. It was found that lessons supported by mimicry and gestures enabled students to remember events and concepts better, and were particularly effective in concretizing abstract historical knowledge and creating vivid mental images for students. Moreover, teachers' expression of emotions through their facial expressions significantly contributed to establishing an emotional bond with students and making the lesson more meaningful and memorable from the students' perspective.

Another important finding of the study is that teachers were able to observe the impact of mimicry and gestures on the lesson through direct feedback from students. Increased classroom interaction, the reduction of distance between teacher and students, and the observation that mimicry can be more effective for some students and less so for others all indicate that this process may vary depending on individual differences and student profiles.

In this context, it is shown that subconscious mimicry and gestures used by social studies teachers during history narration enhance both the teachers' expressive power and the overall effectiveness of the lesson. If teachers use these natural and mostly automatic mimicry and gestures more consciously for pedagogical purposes, it can have a positive effect on lesson quality and student achievement. However, it should not be overlooked that excessive or uncontrolled use of body language may also lead to negative outcomes.

It is recommended that future studies incorporate multiple data sources, such as classroom observation and student interviews, to provide a more objective assessment of subconscious mimicry's effects in educational settings. Overall, a more conscious, balanced, and pedagogically-informed use of mimicry and gesture is likely to maximize positive outcomes in history education.

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