

Adopting Non-Verbal Communication Variables as Innovative Skills in Counseling Students for Sustainable National Development

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Abstract

The paper examined adopting non-verbal communication variables as innovative skills in counseling students for sustainable national development. Every teacher is essentially and naturally a counsellor. As a specialist work, counselling plays a central role in the development of an individual. For it to be a success, the teacher-counsellor must employ certain skills during the counselling process. It is in the light of this assertion that our paper seeks to examine nonverbal communication variables as innovative and effective skills in academic-counselling of students for sustainable academic and national development. Although researches abound on the importance of communication in counselling, this current work fills the gap regarding investigation into the application of nonverbal communication skills in counselling by academic staff. Two theoretical concepts guided the research: while one is based on behaviourism in counselling, the other is concerned with nonverbal concepts of proxemics, chronemics, kinesics, posture, gesture, haptics, eye contacts and sign language. Secondary data were used in this study. The data were collected from articles, news publications and books. The findings of this study revealed that since counseling takes place between the counsellor and client(s), there is a dire need for the teacher-counsellor to pay adept attention to nonverbal expressions, and acquire other basic communication skills for effective counseling. It is recommended that the concepts discussed in this research be adopted by all as they would be useful in improving all kinds of relationships in every respect, especially, because effective counselling can assist in resolving problems before they get out of control.

Keywords: Communication, Nonverbal Communication, Counselling, National Development.

Introduction

Generally, communication is the act or process of using words, sounds, signs or behaviours to express or exchange information or ideas, thoughts and feelings. It entails the use of verbal and non-verbal cues in transmitting the desired information. Non-verbal communication involves the transmission of messages without the use of words, letters or symbols. This communication involves reliance on our physical environment, body movement, drawings and pictures including sign language. The implication of this is that there should be a common understanding between the transmitter and the receiver on what the movement and or the sign entails, Eaves *et al* (2018). Again, non-verbal communication includes body language, gestures, facial expressions, and even posture or any other communication that is not spoken. Non-verbal communication sets the tone of a

conversation, and can seriously undermine the message contained in your words if you are not careful to control it (Kabir, 2017).

Counselling is an interactive relationship that exists between the client(s) and the experts (counsellor). The Counsellor, by virtue of his/her training, has mastered some theories, laws or conceptual models that he can apply to the specific problems/issues presented by the client. Egbochuku (2002) defined counselling as a —face to face situation in which a counsellor, by virtue of her training and skill, helps the client to face, perceive, clarify, solve and resolve his adjustment problems/issues.

To achieve the objectives of this paper, behaviourism as a theory was adopted alongside the concerns of nonverbal communication as theoretical concepts. The study fills the gap in respect of investigation into the application of nonverbal communication skills in counselling, although there are various studies undertaken in the fields of communication and counselling.

This research is, therefore, of great significance to counselors, specifically, as the findings would guide them on adopting nonverbal communication skills in counselling processes in order to decode the client's problems that need attention. The study will also avail the client of the consciousness of conduct and behaviour, especially, before the counsellor as every bodily movement and unsaid words matter in the counselling interaction. In every human affair, the findings of this research will facilitate a healthy interpersonal relationship amongst persons in the course of business, social and other spheres of life as it serves a proactive measure in resolving and averting interpersonal crisis.

Theoretical Review

This paper adopts behaviourism as related to counselling as a framework for this research. Behavioural theory seeks to explain human behaviour by analyzing the antecedents and consequences present in the individual's environment and the learned associations he or she has acquired through previous experience. As a theory, it holds that behaviour is the result produced by the stimuli of an organism. It mainly focuses on the observable behaviour that is objective. It does not take the internal mental activities into account. It refers to the acquisition of behaviour which is new. Behaviourism focuses on the idea that all behaviours are learned through interaction with the environment. This learning theory, therefore, submits that behaviours are learned from the environment, and says that innate or inherited factors have very little influence on behaviour.

The other considered concept is concerned with nonverbal indices of proxemics, chronemics, kinesics, posture, gesture, haptics, eye contacts and sign language.

The behavioural theory and the nonverbal concepts are particularly relevant to our current research because clients, obviously, display such behaviours described in this framework during counselling sessions and those observable behaviours must be taken into account and consideration by the counsellor in terms of non-verbal communication expressions.

Non-Verbal Communication Skills in Counseling

While verbal communication is about language, both written and spoken, referring to our use of words, nonverbal communication refers to communication that occurs through means other than words, such as body language, gestures, and silence. The following are identified nonverbal forms of communication laced with in-depth meaning:

Proxemics

Proxemics, coined by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in 1966, is the amount of space that people feel necessary to put between themselves and others as they interact. It involves the way people use physical space to convey messages between them. The category of proxemics is most commonly sub-grouped into a physical territory and personal territory, although proxemics can also be identified in several other forms, such as eye contact, facial expression, smells, body warmth, gender, and the number of people involved.

The area of the personal territory is further sub-grouped as public space (ranging from 12–25 feet between people), social space (ranging from 4–10 feet between people), personal space (2–4 feet of separation), and finally intimate space (a foot or less of separation). The physical distance between them is related to their social distance. For example, people who know each other very well often communicate in the intimate space, which is about 1.5 feet away from each other, whereas acquaintances will usually communicate about 12 feet from each other (Westland, 2015).

In another consideration, people use the four distances in communication on a face-to-face basis. For very confidential communications, an intimate distance is used. In a conversation involving family and close friends, a personal distance can be adopted. For business transactions a social distance is used. Lastly, a public distance is used when talking to a group in a room.

Chronemics

Chronemics is a field of study examining the utilization of time in nonverbal communication. Perceptions of time can play significant roles in various forms of nonverbal communication. For example, a slight pause before finishing an announcement can help to build a sense of anticipation in one's audience (Norcross, 2011). Aside from the transmission of mood, time can also figure into communication in terms of attention span and the expression or reinforcement of power relationships. A culture's perception of time not only influences the way they communicate but also the way they organize and execute their daily lives.

Kinesics

Kinesics involves the study of communication through body movement and facial expression. It is the study of how "body movements and gestures serve as a means of nonverbal communication. Posture and gestures are important features in this form of communication. In short, different movements of the body convey particular ideas and

kinesics is how nonverbal communication is interpreted, which will greatly vary across cultures. Through body movements, it is possible to send signals, such as leaning forward when someone is talking to show you are engaged and listening. Being aware of kinesics can be an aid in relationships, job interviews, or when meeting new people.

According to Allard-Kropp (2022), this term was first used in 1952 by Ray Birdwhistell, an anthropologist who studied this certain movement. He argued that all movements of the body meant something. He said that nothing was done by accident, and every movement was used to say how the person was feeling.

Posture

Posture varies from person to person and can be interpreted as nonverbal communication. Posture is the position in which someone holds his body when standing or sitting. It is also meant to show a way of dealing with or considering something. Much can be interpreted from a person's posture such as their view of themselves, their mood, etc. Such behaviour can be intended to impress or mislead another individual in a particular attitude or mood. Posture is used to determine a participant's degree of attention or involvement, the difference in status between communicators, and the level of fondness a person has for the other communicator.

Gesture

As a non-verbal form of communication, gesture is a distinguished physical movement that is an expression of inner thoughts and emotions. Gestures can range from full-body expressions such as dancing or hugging, to smaller gestures in the hands or arms such as a slap across the face, or facial gestures such as scrunching of the face to convey discomfort or disgust. Gestures vary widely across cultures, just as vastly as spoken language.

Haptics

Haptics is a form of nonverbal communication used to refer to the sense of touch and touching capabilities. Haptics can be broken down and organized into three different fields. Haptic communication is the way that people communicate based solely through touch. This sense is important for humans because it provides information about objects that we touch. Touch can send a very strong message (positive, negative, sexual, or platonic). Haptic communication is a key to physical intimacy. In a classical research conducted by Jones and Yarbrough (1985), as noted in Allard-Kropp, (2022), there are 7 different types of touch: positive touches, playful touches, control touches, ritualistic touches, hybrid touches, task-related touches, and accidental touches.

Haptic technology is a technology that interfaces with the user through the sense of touch. An example of this might be all of the touch-screen cell phones that have become very popular in recent times.

Haptic perception is used when we recognize an object by touching it. It involves the combination of the senses in the skin, the position of the hand, and conformation. This is

used in many everyday actions. An example of this would be using your hand to dig around in your bag looking for a particular object, like a cell phone or a pen. This haptic is particularly useful for the blind who may rely entirely upon touch in order to identify an object since they cannot see it.

An ethnographic representation of haptics in different cultures depends on what is socially acceptable. For example, in some climes, it is usually a form of positive touching when one pats someone's head, but in another culture, it could be considered rude to touch someone's head.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is one of the most important forms of nonverbal communication between people. Eye contact signals vary from culture to culture and vary among certain religions as well. As observed by Allard-Kropp (2022) for example, in America, someone who is unable to maintain eye contact is seen as unconfident, shy, or submissive. In some Arab countries, a person who is unable to maintain eye contact is seen as disrespectful. Some cultures, such as South Asia, might view extended eye contact as challenging, rude, and aggressive. The author further notes that in the Islamic faith, Muslims often lower their gaze and do not look at the opposite gender's eyes after the initial greeting. This is because lustful glances to those of the opposite gender are prohibited. What is considered harmless flirting in some western cultures may be seen as a form of adultery in Islam. In English-speaking cultures, a certain amount of eye contact is required in daily social situations, but too much eye contact can have misdirected meaning, often misinterpreted.

Sign Languages

Sign language is a formal language using a system of hand gestures and movements, typically replacing vocalization. Sign language is the dominant language for the deaf community. Like any other language, it has its own unique structure and linguistic components. Also similar to how most languages are learned, sign language is learned through visualization, practice, and patience. However, understanding that 90% of the deaf community have hearing parents, sign language is mostly learned in schools because for those 90%, sign language is not their mother tongue (Allard-Kropp, 2022). However, spoken languages are faster than sign language, which means that it takes a longer time.

Non-Verbal Communication Skills and Effective Counselling

In counselling, the majority of communication is nonverbal. Counsellors need to be aware of what they may be communicating to their clients through their non-verbal behaviour. They also need to give attention to what is being communicated through the non-verbal behaviour of their clients.

NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOUR	
Body Language	Paralinguistic
▪ Gestures	▪ Sighs
▪ Facial expressions	▪ Grunts
▪ Posture	▪ Groans
▪ Body orientation	▪ Voice pitch change
▪ Body proximity/distance	▪ Voice volume
▪ Eye contact	▪ Voice fluency
▪ Mirroring	▪ Nervous giggles
▪ Remove barriers (e.g. desks)	

The individual inner emotional state is communicated through his body. We give each other messages through body movement, the intonation of one's voice, facial expressions, posture, gestures and eye contact. Some of these movements may be slight or fleeting but in the heightened atmosphere of one-to-one counselling they are more often than not registered. Counsellors need to be aware of two sets of body language: his own and that of his client. As a helper, the counsellor's body needs to demonstrate behaviour that is facilitative. In psychological terminology, non-facilitative behaviour is called *adverse stimulus*. This occurs when the counsellor displays an attitude that is off-putting to the client. Counsellors may display signs of non-attention; for example, looking bored, yawning, fidgeting or showing distractive behaviour. Another example of adverse stimulus is punitive attention - when the helper looks stern, perhaps tight lipped, raising their eyebrows or staring fixedly at the speaker. It is not difficult to appreciate how this type of response acts as a deterrent to accessing any material that the client senses the helper may disapprove of (Egbochuku, 2008). Other mannerisms like picking at fingers, shrugging or sniffing could be distracting to the client.

While counsellors need to be aware of their body language, it is also their work to decode, understand and interpret the body language of his client. What might their body language tell us? Body and facial expression can inform us about hidden feelings. For example:

- He is angry - his mouth is tensed. His eyes are narrowed and he is leaning back in his chair and is avoiding eye contact.
- He is very upset and near to tears - he has placed his hand up to his forehead and his mouth is twitching. He is leaning slightly forward and his head is down.
- He is eager to be understood - he is leaning towards me, with his feet placed firmly on the floor; he gesticulates freely with his hands, he is talking intently and his eyes are fixed on mine.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the significance of nonverbal communication skills in counselling tertiary students for sustainable academic development. Reflecting on verbal and nonverbal communication can help the counsellor remove misunderstandings while clarifying the needs and meaning behind his clients' actions and identifying the changes they wish to make and the goals they want to set. The research is of great significance to counselors, specifically, as the findings would guide them on adopting nonverbal communication skills in counselling processes in order to decode the client's problems that need attention. The study also avails the client of the consciousness of conduct and behaviour, especially, before the counsellor as every bodily movement and unsaid words matter in the counselling interaction. Again, managing silence which means having the ability to recognize a constructive silence also serves as a vital form of nonverbal communication because as a golden rule, counselling is to use your ears and eyes more than your mouth!

Recommendations

Given the findings of this research, it is recommended that:

- i. Counsellors should as a matter of importance learn communication skills in order to effectively achieve the aim of counselling.
- ii. Since non-verbal communication sets the tone of a conversation, and can seriously undermine the message contained in the words if the counsellor is not careful to control it, it is important that the counsellor is conversant with the tenets of nonverbal communication skills.
- iii. The concepts discussed in this research should be adopted by all as they would be useful in improving all kinds of relationships in every respect, especially, because effective counselling can assist in resolving problems before they get out of control.
- iv. Teachers, administrators and parents should be exposed to nonverbal communication skills in order to help them play the role of natural counsellors where necessary.

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