



USE AND PERCEPTION OF TIME IN WORKPLACE INTERACTION: A CASE OF NAROK TEACHERS' TRAINING COLLEGE-KENYA

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ABSTRACT: *The importance of nonverbal communication cannot be underestimated. A significant part of human communication does not rely on words but on nonverbal signs such as time, tone of voice, body movements and touch, among others. Nonverbal communication is a powerful part of all social and professional discourse. The objective of the study was to ascertain gender differences in the use and perception of time in workplace interaction. The researcher used the semiotics theory, which is the study of signs in relation to their mode of transmission, as well as the Tubbs Model of Communication, which stipulates that communication is a non-static process of a sender/receiver attempting to stimulate meaning in the mind of another. The study was carried out in Narok Teachers' Training College in the Lower Melili location, Narok County. Respondents were purposively sampled while data collection was carried out using questionnaires. The data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. In as much as absolute mastery of the use of time is not an absolute guarantee, improved consciousness in what one intends to communicate using this non-verbal cue is important in the workplace. The research outcomes were consolidated through coding, tabulation and use of frequency histograms. Further clarification of data was made in narrative form. Some of the findings on use and perception of time revealed that belated or real-time responses were majorly based on relationships rather than the tasks to be performed.*

KEYWORDS: Non-verbal communication, Work-place interaction, Non-static process, Semiotics.



INTRODUCTION

Effective use of nonverbal cues can reinforce opinion, create common ground in communication and consequently enhance efficiency and success when meaning is shared in workplace interaction. An individual can use channels to convey emotions and give clues about one's personality. These symbols include the use and perception of time among others and ought to be interpreted correctly since they communicate thoughts and attitudes to an external referent. According to Mullen et al. (1986), communication takes place even when it happens at the subconscious, unintentional and non-verbal level.

This study investigated gender differences in use and perception of time at a primary teachers training college, a tertiary learning institution. Rarely are people conscious that the use and perception of time can perhaps communicate more than specific utterances in organizational interaction, contribute to the overall communication process and are indeed part of the language system. The researcher emphasizes that we cannot avoid sending NVCs, but it is important and possible to train oneself to effectively send the right ones since good communication is a key component in all personal and professional relationships. This can improve communicative skills among many professionals. For instance, an orderly transition of turn-taking to regulate interaction is an aspect of time, which is a non-verbal cue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nonverbal Communication

According to Hybels and Weaver (2004), non-verbal communication is the information passed without using words; much of it, like pace or a smile, may be unintended, but they still convey meaning. Leathers (1997) suggests that nonverbal communication includes three important interactive systems: visual, auditory and invisible communication.

McMahon and Darnels (2002) state that an effective way for leaders to increase cohesiveness of their groups is to be competent in nonverbal communication and to carefully attend to interactions within the groups in order to correct inadvertent messages and, if possible, eliminate them. Competence in nonverbal communication also enables individuals to become more accurate at giving or reading verbal messages.

Chronemics (Time)

Time is seen as a precious resource, a valuable, tangible commodity. We spend, save, make, fill or waste it. Time is highly divisible and the way we schedule events reflects the urgency and precision with which we deal with time, as stated by Burgoon et al. (1996). Anthropologists Rapport and Overing (2000) say that our perception of time communicates a lot about our private and professional lives. If one arrives at an appointment thirty minutes late and gives no apology, a perception is formed about him/her, while expressing guilt at late arrival also gives an explanation about one's personality. In specific cultures, violations of timeline norms are perceived as intentional messages. Crouch (2004) points out that Benjamin Franklin equated time to money. It is fixed and measurable; value is attached to schedules, while efficiency is measured in terms of ability to meet deadlines.



The idea of punctuality is perceived differently in varying cultures; for instance, Argyle (1982) states that in Japanese culture, time usage depends on status, relationships and face saving. A person of higher status can be waited for longer. In this way, there is a demonstration that the reaction to punctuality is deeply rooted in culture. However, the researcher sought to establish that age and gender also contribute to time usage.

People tend to be impulsive and spontaneous and have casual, relaxed lifestyles in cultures with present-time orientation. On the contrary, future-oriented people emphasize change and optimism. In certain circumstances there is intolerance towards extension and postponement of tasks, as indicated by Adler (2005). Further, Hall (1983) divides time into monochronic (M-Time) and polychronic (P-Time).

Monochronic Time

M-Time is perceived as linear and segmented. Hall (1984) states that time is handled like money; it gets spent, saved, wasted or lost. Time is also perceived as a scarce resource that must be rationed through schedules, appointments and strict adherence to initial plans. Germany and Australia are some of the countries classified under M-Time cultures.

Polychronic Time

In P-Time, pace is more leisurely since human relations are more vital than tasks. There are obligations to maintain harmonious relationships but not to do what is right. This therefore allows flexibility in the use of time. Smith and Bond (1999) posit that time is perceived as less tangible and the feeling that one is wasting it is not prevalent. Multiple tasks can be carried out simultaneously. Other P-Time cultures are Arab and Latin American. However, in the researchers' view, the M-Time and P-Time treatment of time may not be an absolute classification of individuals in terms of use and perception of time. Below is a summary of M-Time and P-Time concepts.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was used to explain trends in use and perception of time in workplace interaction at Narok Teachers Training College. There was purposive sampling of a study group within the NTTC population. The descriptive research design has orientation toward both qualitative and quantitative data.

The opinions raised were intended to provoke reasoned debate on NVCs. In addition, the numerical data was used to judge the trends in use and perception of time as nonverbal language components.

The study targeted 20 female and 20 male respondents among tutors and students at Narok Teachers Training College. This is because the core business of a learning institution necessitates major interaction between the two groups, students and tutors. Gender was considered as an important social variable in the study.



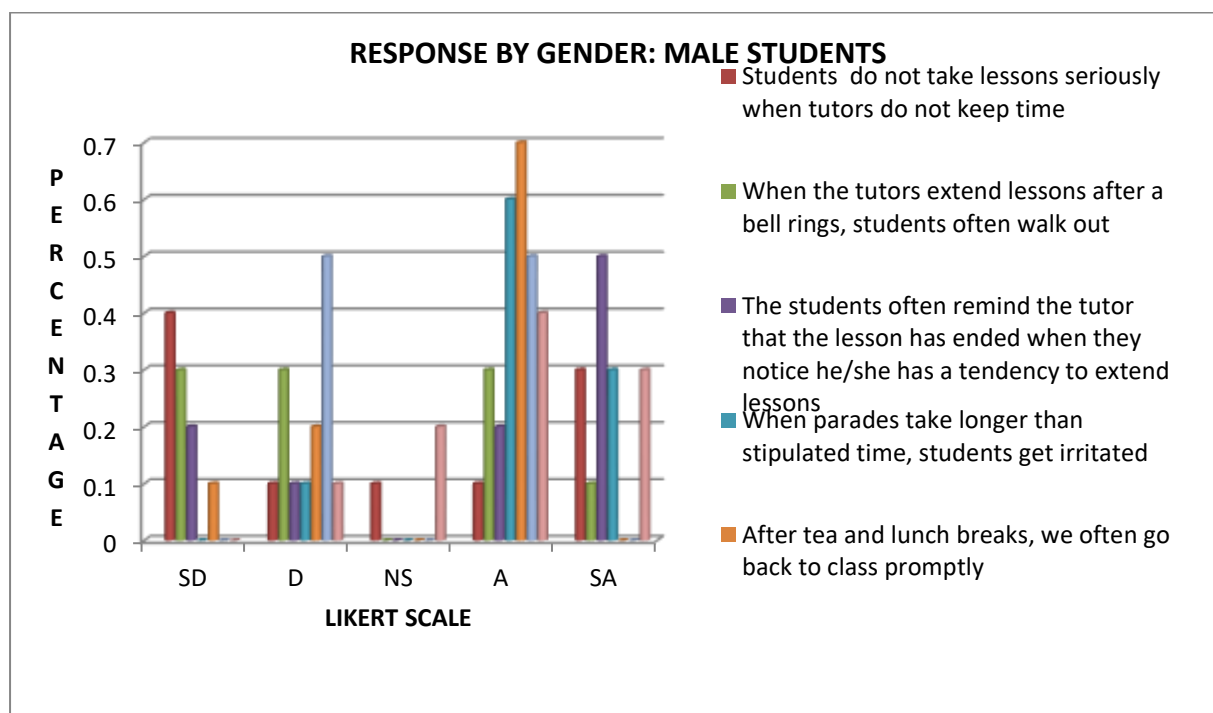
Data Collection Method

The study employed questionnaires to obtain data on use and perception of time. The researcher then documented data using field research notes to record occurrences as heard and observed. These constituted expanded accounts of impressions from observations and field contacts as suggested by Uwe (2009). The research diary contained the research experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, problems and breakthroughs. It also contained the researchers' generalizations, assessments and interpretations of data obtained. The documentation sheet notes carried further information about the respondents.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

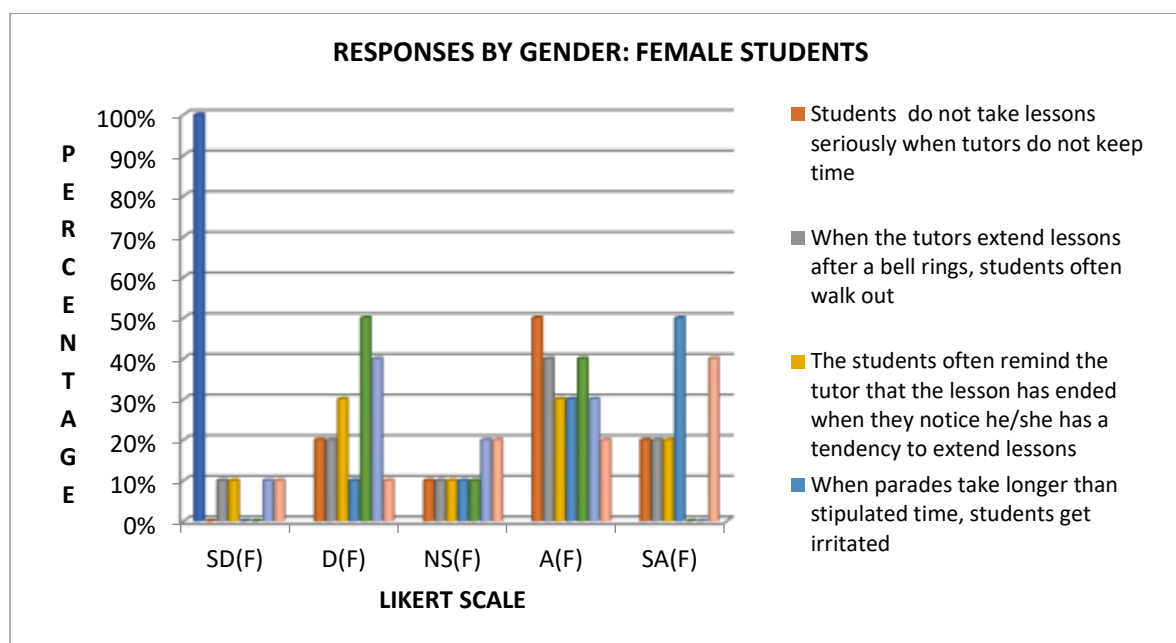
Students' use and perception of time

Figure 2.0: Analysis of male students' responses to use and perception of time



The data in figure 2.0 revealed that when parades took longer than the stipulated time, students got irritated, but so long as what was being done was seen to be directly related to their training, they took no offense; for instance, when lessons took longer than the stipulated time, only a negligible 10% agreed that they would walk out.

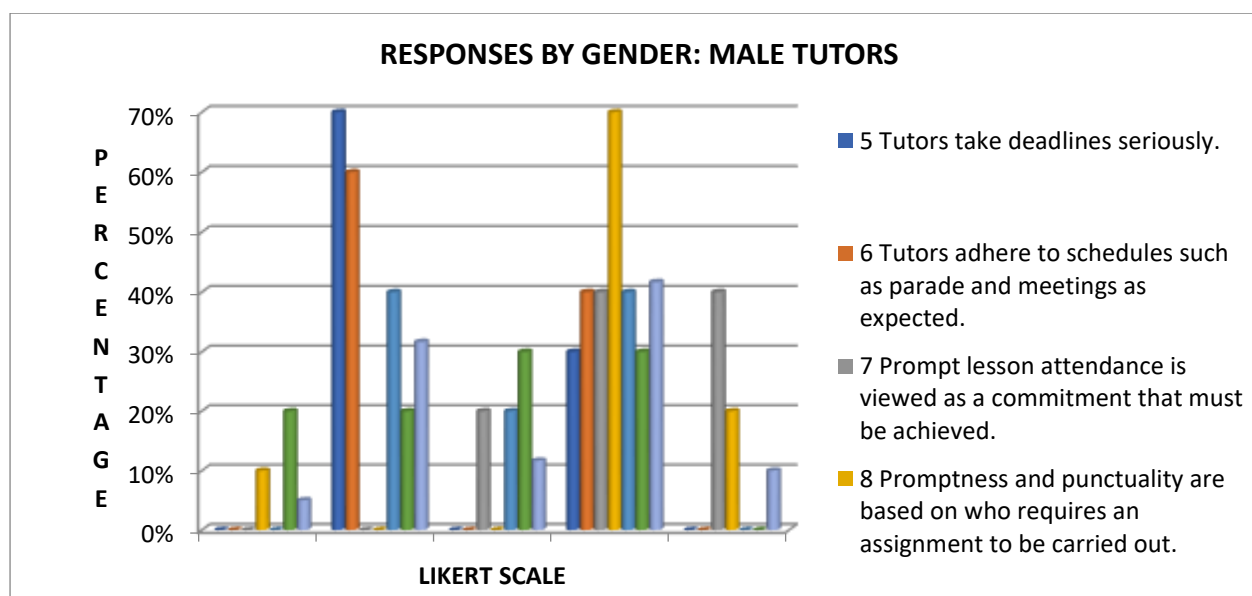
The same phenomenon was seen when students were expected to change assignments. However, a majority agreed that tutors' time consciousness directly influenced their training outcomes in terms of grades attained.

**Figure 2: Analysis of female students' use and perception**

The data showed that 50% of the female students were of the view that students were likely to take lessons seriously when tutors had shorter response times; similarly, an equal percentage felt their grades depended on tutors' use of time. However, with regard to changing assignments promptly, the perception was like that of their male counterparts, disregarding their own need to respond promptly. There were 66% who strongly agreed/agreed that their grades depended on tutors' response latency.

Analysis of tutors' use and perception of time by gender.

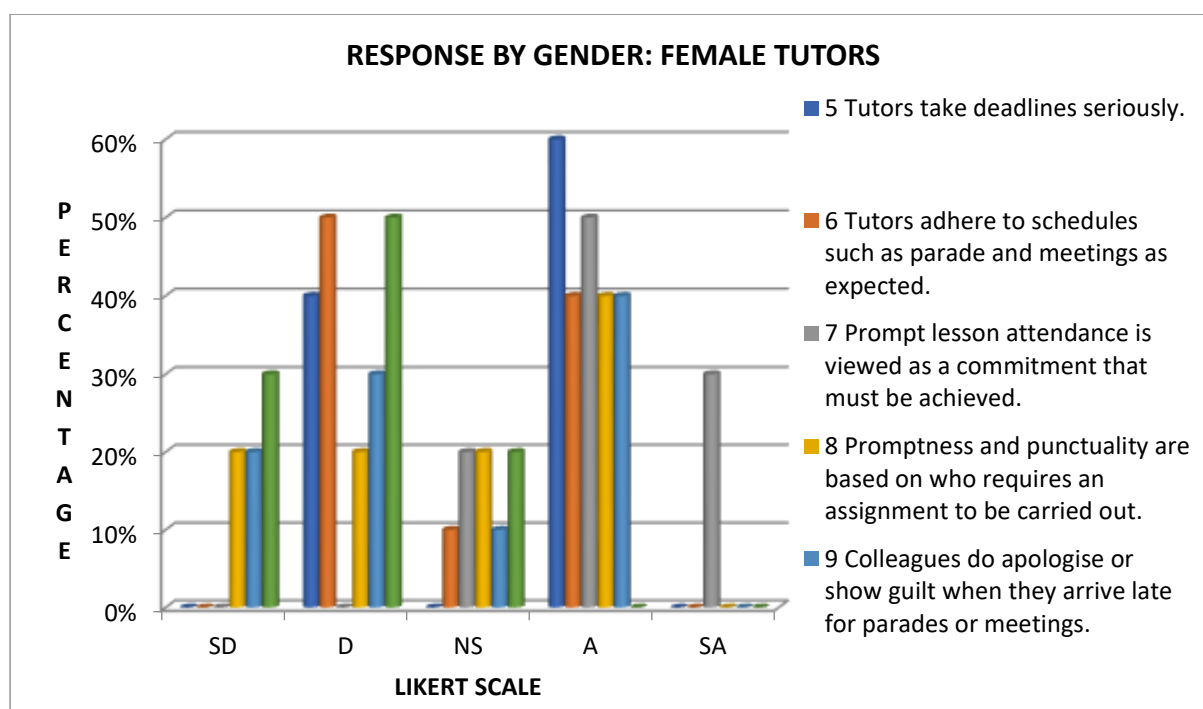
Figure 3 below shows the analysis of male tutors' responses.

Figure 3: Analysis of male tutors' use and perception of time



In the data in figure 2.2, a majority 70% of the male tutor respondents said that deadlines were not taken seriously, while 60% also witnessed non adherence to schedules. However, punctuality to lesson attendance was a commitment that had to be achieved as indicated by 80% who strongly agreed/agreed to this perception. A vast majority of 90% said that promptness and punctuality depended on who required an assignment to be carried out. This showed the value of interpersonal relationships rather than tasks, while only 40% said that colleagues would apologize for belated response time. Interestingly, 30% said they were unsure of their reaction to administrators' belated response time to given schedules, while another 30% took offense at this; the remaining 40% were flippant towards administrators' response latency.

Figure 4: Analysis of female tutors' use and perception of time



The data above shows that 60% of the female tutors took deadlines seriously, while 50% also valued adherence to schedules in contrast to the male respondents. Similarly, 40% viewed promptness and punctuality to lesson attendance as a commitment that must be attained. These responses showed that individuals should not be classified as purely monochronic or polychronic time-oriented. The researchers put into cognizance that in every learning institution there are structures and schedules; therefore, functions cannot be unstructured and spontaneous; time is measured by events, clocks and calendars. However, from the data above, conflicting time orientations on how people use and perceive time were evident.

When 40% were conscious of the need to apologize or show guilt when late for meetings, 10% were not sure if this was a necessary gesture. Their response latency did not show the necessity of building interpersonal relationships or the need for immediacy.

Just like what was seen in the students' responses, the reality in practice as observed among the female tutor respondents exhibited shorter response times to schedules than their male counterparts. They also often compensated for belated responses by apologizing or showing guilt in different ways.



In the data, 20% of these respondents were not sure if it was necessary to take offense at an administrator's belated response time, while half of the respondents would be offended by this occurrence. This revealed the common tendency of seeing the speck in your brother's eye yet ignoring the log in your own eyes. We tend to set higher standards for others in their use and perception of time while downplaying our own response latency shortcomings.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

In gender differences in the use and perception of time in the study, it emerged that there was a hybrid of M-Time and P-Time orientation. There was commitment to interpersonal relationships with regard to promptness and punctuality based on who had given an assignment. When there was a prompt change of assignments or belated responses, the allegiance was more commitment to relationships than tasks for both the male and female. However, responses to schedules depended on specific assignments given to individuals. This meant that specific roles assigned to individuals increased short response latency. None of the genders could be looked at as purely polychronic or monochronic.

The male and female student respondents felt that their learning outcomes directly depended on the tutors' use and perception of time. They would take offense at both the belated response and when the lessons or parade took longer than the stipulated schedule. Inasmuch as punctuality is held in high regard, it is often viewed from others' use and perception of time rather than one's own.

Among the male and female tutor respondents, the female showed commitment to both interpersonal relationships as well as the tasks to be performed, while the male seemed to be more committed to interpersonal relationships rather than tasks. It was who required a task to be performed rather than what the task was. Even though use and perception of time can be used to show control and dominance, both male tutors took offense at administrators' belated responses, while the female largely disregarded this.

There was a general perception of being in control of time evident in how respondents largely found it difficult to observe schedules or beat deadlines, as the responses depended on the individual who required an assignment to be carried out. Similarly, tutors' use and perception of time determine how assignments get carried out by students. So long as tutors set the pace, everything else falls into place in terms of daily institutional routine. For instance, tutors' promptness in lesson attendance instigates students' prompt resumption of classes. Students were intolerant of lack of time consciousness on the part of the tutors but not themselves. They felt that learning outcomes in tests and examinations depend on tutors' time consciousness.

Recommendations

Workplace communication can be improved by conscious effort and training on competence in the use and perception of time as non-verbal cues. In learning institutions, time ought to be viewed in terms of the duration component to carefully schedule and evaluate events in terms of minutes, hours, and days and for the whole year, rather than being perceived as sequences of events on a daily basis that vary in every set of circumstances.



Inability to cope with stress associated with work and learning can be reduced by continuous training on an individual's use and perception of time. This is because timely response is important in all workplace interactions and the need to show what one has accomplished by the end of a duration is important, since the passage of time cannot be restored.

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