Verbal and Nonverbal Communication and Nigerian University Workplace Peacefulness

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Abstracts: The study investigated Nigerian university workers' perceptions of the verbal and non-verbal communication variables that are important to workplace peace. The study used a mixed methodology with poetic inquiry triangulated with quantitative methodology. The researchers posed and answered seven research questions. The data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire constructed using Google Forms, from where the qualitative data were extracted and analysed using thematic and structural coding. The quantitative data analysis was done using simple percentages. The results showed that communication could engender conflict when it is improper, disrespectful, insensitive, inconsiderate and poorly channelled. For verbal communication, participants considered fluency and appropriate choice of words as very important to workplace peace. For non-verbal communication, politeness, attentiveness, and greetings were rated as most important to workplace peace. Civility and communication training were recommended for university staff.

Keywords: Communication, Conflict, Language, Peacefulness, Workplace.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a culturally diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its unique cultural practices and beliefs [1]. Cultural and linguistic heterogeneity also reflect in Nigerian universities. Each university is, therefore, a microcosm of the ethnolinguistic diversity that is evident in the Nigerian polity. Rodriguez [2] acknowledges the presence of social and linguistic diversities in the workplace. Workplace diversity has been identified as a double-edged sword as it can bring about numerous benefits such as increased creativity, innovation, and improved decision-making. On the other hand, workplace diversity can also lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, and a lack of cohesiveness among employees [3]. These conflicts, if not addressed effectively, can lead to reduced productivity, increased employee turnover, and decreased job satisfaction [4]. Thus, the network of relationships in a multicultural university environment is evidently a fertile bed for conflict to propagate [5]. Ensuring workplace peacefulness is not only essential for personal but also for institutional well-being.

One common denominator in Nigerian universities, despite the diversities, is language and, by implication, communication. Sapir [6] describes language as the key to a people's heart. In other words, language unlocks thoughts, emotions, perceptions, insights, intuitions and attitudes. Conflict and peace can be constructed from the verbal and non-verbal narratives enacted in the workplace. Therefore, one of the ways to prevent conflict or ensure workplace peacefulness could be by understanding workplace pragmatics, which involves the study of how people use language in social interaction to achieve their goals [7].

Our focus in this paper is the academic workplace and the language that could be deployed to create and sustain a culture of peace in the workplace. Since language is highly contextualised, language that is appropriate in one context may be inappropriate in another. Although language serves a variety of purposes in formal and non-formal contexts, a clear understanding of the context of discourse is important in negotiating workplace peacefulness. This study investigated verbal and non-verbal language components that university workers associated with workplace peacefulness.

Workplace peacefulness refers to a state of harmony and cooperation among employees in the workplace [8]. It is crucial for organizational success as it fosters teamwork, enhances productivity, and improves job satisfaction. The reverse of workplace peacefulness is workplace conflict. It can arise due to differences in personality, work style, cultural norms, and values. Such conflicts can lead to decreased job satisfaction, increased employee turnover, and reduced productivity [9]. Thus, it is important to promote peacefulness in the workplace.

One factor that is central to the construction of peace or conflict in the workplace is communication [10]. Communication is "a universal process of encoding and decoding thoughts, feelings, emotions, and attitudes" using symbols. [11]. They add that communication is shaped by the cultural, psychological, sociocultural, and environmental factors. Therefore, the main vehicle of communication is language.

1.1. English Language fluency and peacefulness in the workplace

Nigeria is linguistically heterogeneous. But British colonialism had bequeathed to the country English language which has become the official language, language of the elites, language of intra and intercultural transactions, language of commerce, politics, administration, jurisprudence, entertainment, socialization and education. It places a critical role in Nigerian universities as it is the major vehicle of communication in teaching, research as well as in formal and informal communication.

It is, therefore, not surprising that studies show that fluency in English could give an advantage in conflict resolution and workplace peacefulness [12] argues that language learning has the potential to promote peace and understanding in an era of globalization. Specifically, since English is a global language, it can help individuals to bridge cultural divides and develop more positive attitudes towards other cultures [13]; [14]. Generally, some studies associate language fluency with occupational peacefulness [15]; [16]. This is probably because language proficiency is linked to greater intercultural competence which in turn engenders a friendlier work environment [17];[18]. In Nigeria, Kehinde [19] found a strong correlation between language proficiency and social status. Also, Essien and Akpan [20] found that Nigerian university students had a strong preference for English and viewed it as a language of prestige and upward mobility, while indigenous Nigerian languages were viewed as less desirable and associated with lower socioeconomic status. In addition, Ayoh'omide and Kehinde [21] found that the ability to speak English fluently and with a near-native accent was viewed as an important marker of social status and was associated with greater success in education and employment.

1.2. Word choice and workplace peacefulness

Another important variable in workplace communication is word choice. The Bible states, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." [22]. A study by Johnson and Smith [23] that examined the effect of negative language on workplace interactions found that employees who used negative language were more likely to experience conflict and tension with their colleagues. Furthermore, Chen and Lee [24] found that employees who used positive language experienced positive relationships with their colleagues and a higher level of workplace peacefulness. In addition, employees who used positive language reported feeling motivated and engaged at work. In the same vein, Brown and Johnson [25] observed that language choice significantly affected conflict resolution in the workplace. They found that employees who used clear, direct, and respectful language were more successful in resolving conflicts with their colleagues than those who used vague, ambiguous, or disrespectful language.

1.3. Immediacy, civility and workplace peacefulness

Immediacy refers to behaviours that convey a sense of closeness, friendship, and camaraderie to the perceiver of that behaviour. Mehrabian [26] conceptualized immediacy as behaviours that "enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another." Immediate behaviours tend to reduce the social distance between persons [27]. Besides, message receivers evaluate perceived immediate people as more likeable than non-immediate persons [28]. Moreover, Timothy and Uguma [5] found a moderate positive association between lecturers' immediacy and students' perceived peace valence of lecturers' communication. Therefore, immediacy could be a vital ingredient in brewing workplace peacefulness.

Civility, on the other hand, describes how citizens show care for one another and their shared culture [29]. It manifests in "politeness, courtesy and an awareness of other people's rights, wishes, and feelings." [30]. In a survey of faculty, staff and students of the University of Maryland, Baltimore, Aly, et al. [31] found that most respondents preferred to work in a civil environment. In addition, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) has asserted that a civil environment is a necessity for academic freedom and critical to life in a democratic society [32]. Therefore, the principles of immediacy and civility inform our contextual exploration of some of the non-verbal peace dialogic strategies that could be deployed in the Nigerian university workplace. Such strategies include greetings, address, voice, smile, handshake, and hugs.

1.4. Greetings and workplace peacefulness

Greetings are the exchange of customary social goodwill between or among people of a shared environment or culture. In the workplace, the way individuals greet and interact with one another could have a significant impact on their relationships, job satisfaction, and overall workplace culture. It is believed, "The seeds of civility can be planted in an organization by encouraging every employee to give their co-workers greetings befitting the professional nature of the work environment." [33]. Research has shown that greetings and other forms of positive communication in the workplace can have a significant impact on workplace relationships [34]. Additionally, nonverbal communication, including greetings, can convey important social cues and help establish rapport between co-workers [35].

Furthermore, the way greetings are delivered can also impact relationships in the workplace. For example, researchers at the University of California, Irvine found that employees who were greeted with their name or asked about their day, felt more valued and had better relationships with their co-workers than those who received non-personalised greetings [36].

1.5. Curtseying and workplace peacefulness

Culture can also play a significant role in workplace greeting practices. For example, in some cultures, curtseying are more common and considered more respectful than verbal greetings. In contrast, in other cultures, handshakes or verbal greetings are the norms. A study found that individuals from collectivistic cultures, such as Japan or China, tend to prefer more formal and respectful greetings, such as bowing, while individuals from individualistic cultures, such as the United States, tend to prefer more casual greetings, such as handshakes or verbal greetings [37].

In many cultures, gestures and actions related to politeness are used in social interactions. Curtseying is a form of politeness gesture that involves bending at the knees and lowering the body slightly. This gesture is often used to show respect or deference [38]. Among the Efik and Igbo, for instance, a younger person greets the elder with a slight bow. Yoruba men prostrate before their elders, while women kneel or touch their knees while greeting their elders [39;]. It is common to see people who, though, they are not Yoruba, greet Yoruba elders with a touch to their knees. Therefore, cultural literacy is important in a multicultural environment like Nigeria, as it acquaints participants with social intercourse for culturally appropriate responses.

Curtseying may have a positive effect on workplace peacefulness. It could enhance communication and positive interactions [39; 40]. From the observation of interactions between employees at a large corporation, Smith and Jones [41] found that employees who received curtseys from their colleagues were more likely to report feeling respected and valued and were more likely to report positive relationships with their colleagues and a higher level of workplace peacefulness. However, there are cultural differences in the use of curtseying [42; 37]

1.6. Address and workplace peacefulness

The way people address each other in the workplace can have a significant impact on workplace peacefulness. Address, which refers to the linguistic and nonverbal ways in which people refer to or address each other, is a crucial aspect of workplace communication that can influence interpersonal relations and the overall workplace

climate. Research among Chinese employees has shown that the use of appropriate address forms can promote positive workplace relationships, enhance communication, and reduce conflicts, while the use of inappropriate address forms can lead to misunderstandings, tension, and conflict [43]. The authors found that the use of formal address forms helped establish clear roles, reduced ambiguity, and fostered trust and respect among colleagues. Similarly, a study by Gudykunst and Nishida [44] found that the use of formal address forms in Japanese workplaces was important in maintaining social order, reducing conflict, and promoting harmony.

On the other hand, the use of informal address forms, such as first names and nicknames, can signal informality, familiarity, and equality, and can promote a more relaxed and friendlier workplace atmosphere. In a study of the use of informal address forms among Iranian employees by Khodarahmi and Ebrahimi [45], the authors found that informal address created a sense of camaraderie, reduced power differentials, and promoted collaboration and teamwork.

However, the use of inappropriate or offensive address forms, such as derogatory or disrespectful language, can lead to negative emotions, misunderstandings, and conflict. For example, a study by Krishnan and Singaravelu [46] found that the use of inappropriate address forms among Indian employees, such as caste-based or derogatory language, was negatively related to workplace peacefulness, as it led to resentment, disrespect, and conflict.

A study by Tran and Nguyen [47] that investigated the effect of address on workplace peacefulness in Vietnam found that the use of formal address forms, such as titles and last names, established respect and hierarchy in the workplace. But the use of informal address forms, such as first names and nicknames, was perceived as disrespectful and unprofessional. Similar findings were recorded in the United States [48]. Therefore, cultural norms could determine how people respond to an address form.

1.7. Smile and workplace peacefulness

Communication has some nonverbal components. One of such is facial expression. Facial expression can show disapproval or approval, acceptance or rejection, trust or distrust, joy or sadness, imperturbability or anxiety. One facial expression that has featured in research is the smile. As innocent and as innocuous as it seems, a smile is capable of effacing conflict, ameliorating tension and restoring harmony. There is something contagious about a smile. A smile is a little tug at the edges of the mouth but can spread a radiant beam from face to face, illuminating and animating a gloomy atmosphere. Schoenmakers [49] acknowledges, "A big smile can do wonders." [p. 63]. In addition, research shows that employees who smile more often are perceived as more competent and likeable by their co-workers and supervisors [50] and employees who received a smile from a customer or co-worker reported higher levels of positive affect and job satisfaction [51]. Even in the relationship between faculty and students, a smiling lecturer is perceived as more competent, approachable, and likeable by students. [52; 53].

1.8. Attentiveness and workplace peacefulness

Since communication involves a system of input, output and feedback, attentiveness invaluable. Attentiveness refers to an act of deliberate and respectful listening. The Bible warns, "He who answers before listening, that is his folly and his shame." [54]. Listening is not only an act but also an art. Pearson and Porath [55] recommend that listening could help to curtail incivility. Also, Scales [56] offers that respectful listening has reciprocity. Therefore, listening is important in conflict resolution and harmonious existence [57; 58].

1.9. Handshake in Workplace Peacefulness:

A handshake shows mutual respect and acknowledgement of the other. It is a nonverbal communication tool that plays a significant role in the formation of first impressions and social judgments [59]. In the Efik and Ibibio cultures in Nigeria, younger ones offer both hands to their elders in a handshake. In workplaces, juniors often do the same with their seniors. In the Hausa-Fulani culture, one touches one's left breast after a handshake, a sign of goodwill, devotion and endearment. In the same culture, moreover, men do not shake hands with women. Any insensitivity to such cultural restraints can gravely hinder peaceful coexistence in the workplace.

In the workplace, a handshake can give a positive first impression of professionalism, confidence, and sincerity [60]. Research has shown that a firm handshake is associated with higher levels of trust and cooperation in dyadic interactions [61]. Handshake has also been shown to influence negotiation outcomes, with negotiators who used a strong handshake achieving better outcomes than those who used a weak handshake [62]. Furthermore, a handshake has been found to increase the perception of social support and the willingness of people to provide support to others [60]. It has been found to increase the release of the hormone oxytocin, which is associated with social bonding and trust [63].

1.10. Hugging and workplace peacefulness

The workplace can be a stressful environment for many individuals, with various stressors including long working hours, tight deadlines, and interpersonal conflicts. As a result, employers are exploring different ways to promote peacefulness and reduce stress in the workplace. One such method that has gained attention in recent years is hugging. Research suggests that hugging can have positive effects on mental health and well-being [64;65]. Also, hugging can reduce interpersonal conflict, increase social support, improve communication among employees [66], reduce stress [67; 68] and promote positive workplace relationships and reduce negative anxiety and depression [42].

However, hugging may not always be appropriate in the workplace. Firstly, it could be regarded as a breach of personal space if it is not consensual [69]. Secondly, unwanted hugging can lead to negative emotions and increased stress levels [70]. Also, it can create feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and stress for recipients [71], especially when it is initiated by a person in a position of power, such as a supervisor or manager. Women more than men often feel uncomfortable with hugs in the workplace [72]. In addition, hugging could be seen as a sign of favouritism and discrimination, particularly when some workers and not others are hugged [73].

Moreover, hugging may be considered culturally inappropriate. For example, The Efik have a saying that hugging another's wife should not exceed the elbow. Decorum demands some restraint when one hugs a woman (married or single) other than one's close relative. Therefore, such hugs are often executed sideways among the Efik, Ejagham, Ibibio, and Igbo ethnic groups of Nigeria. In some cultures, especially Hausa-Fulani, hugging a woman will be considered extremely indecent. In the workplace, proper knowledge of when and how and with whom to deploy such social nonverbal communication skills can be effective in transmitting peace.

Thus, hugging in the workplace, despite its benefits has its downside.

1.11. Social interaction and workplace peacefulness

Workplace peacefulness is an essential aspect of employee well-being and job satisfaction. Employees who experience a peaceful work environment are more likely to feel valued, motivated, and productive [74]. One factor that has been found to impact workplace peacefulness is informal social interactions. Informal social interactions are unstructured and spontaneous exchanges that occur between colleagues. These interactions can take the form of small talk, sharing personal stories, or engaging in social activities.

Research suggests that informal social interactions can foster workplace peacefulness. For example, Nelson and Quick [75] found that when employees had positive relationships with their co-workers, they were less likely to experience conflict and more likely to report high levels of job satisfaction. Informal social interactions also provide opportunities for emotional support [76]. Also, it can lead to a more cohesive and productive work environment [77]. In addition, informal social interactions can also promote a positive organizational culture [78].

In view of the importance of workplace peace for productivity, the study investigated communication variables that university workers perceived as important to workplace peace. Therefore, the following sections will present the methods of data collection, analysis and the results.

2. METHODS

In this study, a mixed methodology was used. For data collection, a semi-structured questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was labelled *Workplace Peace Language Survey [WPLS]*. It had five sections. Section A elicited demographic data while Section B required respondents to indicate the level to which they considered certain language variables like fluency, rich vocabulary, appropriate choice of words, and intonation, important to peace in their workplaces. In Section C, respondents were to indicate the extent to which they found non-verbal communication strategies important to workplace peace. In Section D, the questionnaire required respondents to indicate how important social interactions are to peace in the university like attending colleagues' social events [birthdays, marriages, christenings, etc] exchanging phone calls and emails, asking about one's well-being and chatting online. The final section required participants to freely comment on what they thought about communication's role in workplace peacefulness.

All participants received assurances of confidentiality, anonymity as well as their rights to withdraw from the study. There were 83 respondents selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The instrument was prepared using Google forms and posted on social network platforms of academics such as professional associations, faculty, and departmental WhatsApp, and Telegram groups. Only volunteers, therefore, participated.
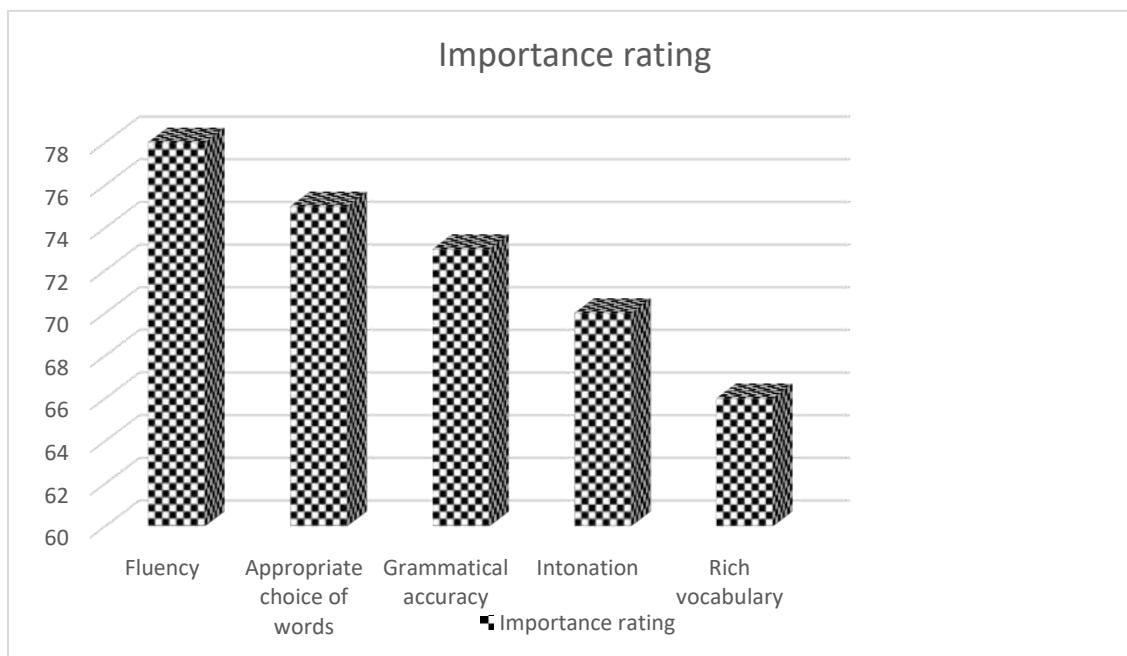
2.1. Research questions

To guide the study, the researchers posed six research questions.

1. How important are verbal language components to workplace peacefulness?
2. What non-verbal communication from junior colleagues do university workers consider important to workplace peacefulness?
3. What non-verbal communication from senior colleagues do university workers consider important to workplace peacefulness?
4. What non-verbal communication from colleagues of equal ranks do university workers consider important to workplace peacefulness?
5. What social activities do university workers consider important to peace in the workplace?
6. How does communication engender workplace conflict?
7. How does communication foster workplace peace?

2.2. Data analysis and presentation of results

Research question 1. How important are verbal language components to workplace peacefulness?

Simple percentages were used to analyse the data and report the result. The verbal language variables that the majority of respondents considered most important to workplace peace was fluency [78%]. This was followed by appropriate choice of words [75%] and grammatical accuracy [73%]. Of course, the least important were intonation [70%] and the richness of one's vocabulary [66%]. This is visualised in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Relative importance of verbal language quality to workplace peacefulness in A Nigerian University

Research question 2: What non-verbal communication from junior colleagues do university workers consider important to workplace peacefulness?

Regarding how university workers esteemed some nonverbal communication cues from their junior colleagues, the results show that the most esteemed nonverbal communication cues were greetings and politeness. This was followed by attentiveness. Details are given in Figure. 2
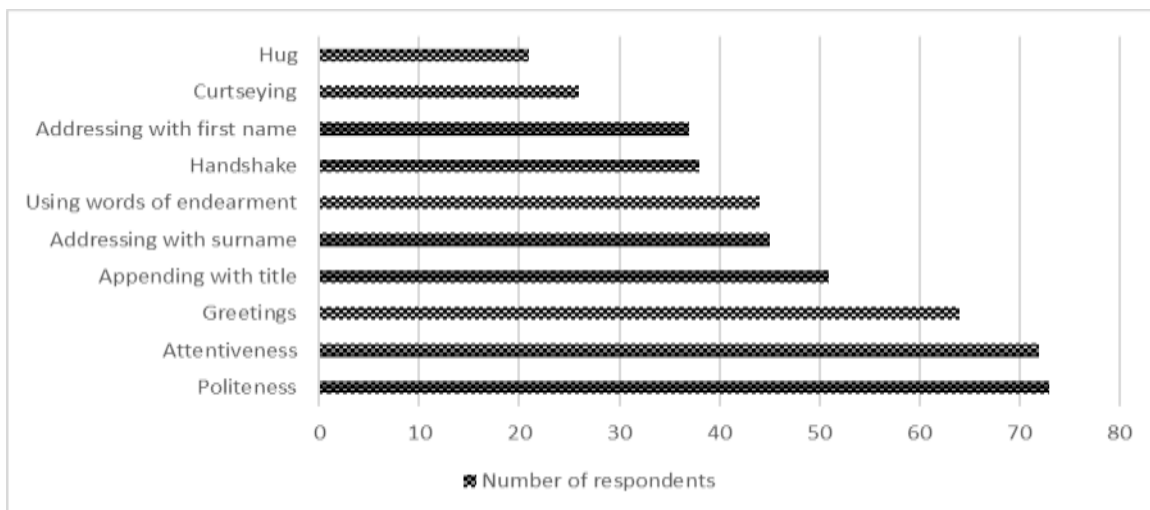

Fig 2. Relative importance of some pragmatics from junior colleagues to workplace peacefulness in a Nigerian university

Research question 3. What non-verbal communication from senior colleagues do university workers consider important to workplace peacefulness?

Regarding the importance of some non-verbal or paralinguistic communication variables to workplace peace, a great majority of respondents indicated that politeness [93%], using words of endearment [87%], greetings [76%],

smiling [70%] and attentiveness [64%] were very important to peace in the workplace. Giving a hug and curtseying were considered unimportant by more than half the respondents. The result is presented in Figure. 3


Fig. 3: Relative importance of some pragmatics from senior colleagues to workplace peacefulness in A Nigerian University

Therefore, the most important nonverbal communication variables from senior colleagues were politeness, attentiveness, and greetings, in that order. This was followed by appending titles. The least important variables were hugging and curtseying.

Research question 4: What non-verbal communication from colleagues of equal ranks do university workers consider important to workplace peacefulness?

For colleagues of equal rank, politeness was considered most important by the majority of participants [91 %], while attentiveness was rated second in importance [90%]. Greetings at workplace was considered the third in importance [84%]. A handshake and words of endearment come fourth [65%] and fifth [51%], respectively. Addressing a colleague with the appropriate title was considered important by 48 per cent of the participants. However, the communication item that most participants [76%] considered least important to workplace peacefulness was curtseying. The details are given in Figure 4.
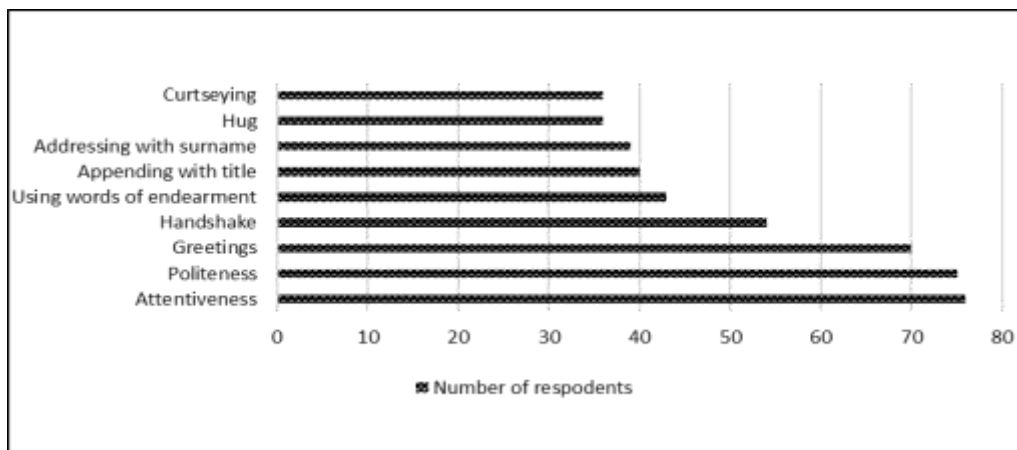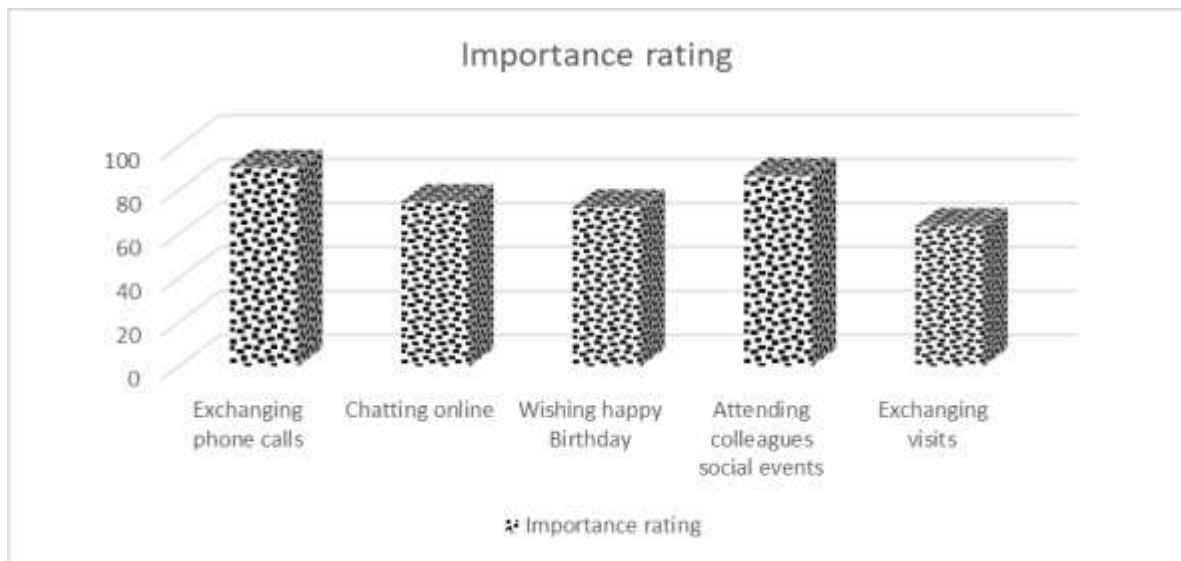

Fig. 4: The relative importance to workplace peacefulness of nonverbal communication from colleagues of equal rank.

Research question 5: What social activities do university workers consider important to peace in the workplace?

Regarding social activities that university workers considered important to peace in the workplace, 90 percent of the respondents considered exchanging phone calls as most important, seconded by attending colleagues' social events such as birthdays, marriages, etc. What the respondents considered least important was online chatting. Nevertheless, 66 percent of respondents still preferred it. The result is presented in Figure 5.

Fig. 5: Relative importance of social interactions to workplace peacefulness in A Nigerian

Research question six: How does communication engender workplace conflict or foster peace?

The qualitative data required to answer the research question were derived from participants' responses to two open-ended questions in the Google Forms:

1) How do you think communication can contribute to conflict in the workplace?
2) How do you think communication can contribute to peace and harmony in the workplace?

The Google Forms arranged the responses automatically in a spreadsheet. Since the names of the participants were not required, responses were only identified by timestamps. For ease of analysis, the timestamps were replaced by randomly generated Nigerian names.

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative data analysis technique that involves identifying and analysing patterns [themes] within the data. In this response, thematic analysis was applied to categorize and code the participants' responses into different themes and sub-themes. The themes captured the main ideas and concepts related to the relationship between communication and conflict in the workplace. The analysis followed an inductive approach to coding. The sub-themes were not predetermined but emerged directly from the data itself. The analysis was data-driven. Thus, patterns and insights emerged organically from the responses provided. Care was taken to understand the contexts and nuances of the participants' statements.

The data were shared with the two of the authors who have experience with qualitative research analysis. They coded and identified themes independently. Commonly identified themes were merged. Themes that were identified by either of the authors, when satisfactorily defended were retained. Therefore, the analysis integrated multiple themes and sub-themes to present a comprehensive view of the relationship between communication and conflict. By exploring how different themes interrelate, the analysis provided a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved. Conclusions were drawn by synthesising the various themes and subthemes.

From the analysis, the following themes and subthemes were identified:

1.   Poor Communication and Conflict: Many   participants commented that poor communication or lack of effective communication can contribute to conflict in the workplace. This includes the use of vulgar language,

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refusal to consider others' feelings, misunderstanding of information, communication without respect, and wrong presentation of facts.

2. Choice of Words and Tone: Participants mention that the choice of words and tone during communication can significantly impact the occurrence or escalation of conflicts. The use of hurtful or abusive words, impoliteness, and disrespect can trigger conflicts.

3. Cultural Considerations: Cultural differences are noted as important in communication. Ignoring or undermining other people's views due to cultural norms can lead to conflicts.

4. Misunderstanding and Assumptions: Misunderstanding of information, making wrong assumptions, and lack of clarification contribute to conflicts in the workplace.

5. Listening and Attention: Lack of attention during communication or failure to listen attentively can lead to conflict. Also, closed-mindedness and not accepting others' perspectives can be problematic.

6. Negative Communication: Participants also noted that excessive criticism or inappropriate communication may lead to conflicts or.

A diagram was used to visualise the responses. See Figure 6.
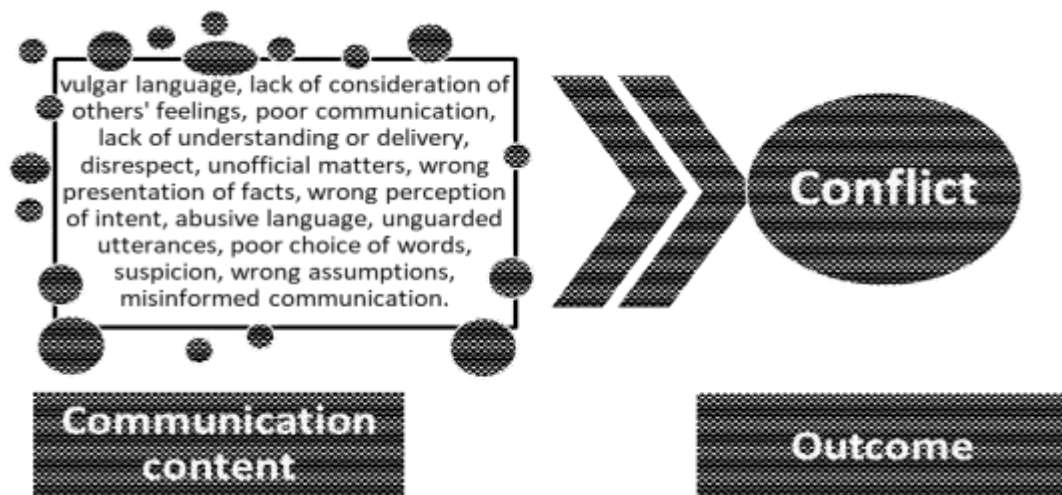
Fig.6. How communication may cause conflict

Research question seven: How does communication foster workplace peacefulness?

To answer the research question, we performed a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. This involved categorising and coding the responses into different themes and sub-themes. The main themes identified were

1. Recognition of rights and feelings of others:

2. Choice of communication channels creates harmony: Sometimes, the channel of communication may distort the communication and consequently convey unintended messages, leading to conflict. So many participants noted that communication can engender workplace peacefulness when it passes through a carefully chosen channel,

3. Clarity and continuity in communication: Participants observed that frequency of communication eliminates communication gaps and assumptions, especially when the communication is devoid of ambiguity. Danfo, one of the respondents stated that "The use of official communication at the workplace can contribute to peace and

harmony, especially when communication is well understood by those communicating. Misunderstanding sometimes sets in, and these could take away peace and harmony at the workplace." Another participant also commented similarly that communication fosters workplace peacefulness, "…when it is clear and precise or concise devoid of narrative gaps or ambiguity…." [Adiaha]

4. Positive relationship and respect: Participants further commented that communication can engender cordial relationship in a workplace, "when you accept others as who they are and appreciate their strengths and weaknesses." [Eburutu].

5. Politeness and Courtesy:

For instance, one of respondents commented, "If you address people well with the right choice of words and are courteous while speaking to them, there will always be peace and harmony. Everybody wants to be treated with respect." [Kehinde]. Another respondent related that "Use of Polite expressions when relating with people or colleagues keeps their ego intact and makes them attentive to issues under consideration." [Agbo]

6. Culturally sensitive communication engenders peace: In this regard one of the participants noted, "When communication takes into consideration the values, culture, interests, and the psychosocial well-being of the participants, then it can help build peace and harmony in the workplace. [Bassey]

The analysis indicates that effective communication, characterized by politeness, clarity, and respect, plays a crucial role in promoting peace and harmony in the workplace. Proper understanding, active listening, and avoiding misinterpretations are essential components of effective communication. Additionally, fostering positive relationships, embracing cultural sensitivity, and acknowledging the rights and feelings of colleagues contribute to a harmonious work environment. Encouraging dialogue and feedback further enhances communication and conflict resolution. The findings emphasise the significance of communication in nurturing a positive workplace culture and preventing conflicts. The findings are further visualised in Figure 7.

Fig. 7. How communication fosters workplace peace

Discussion of findings

The study investigated the importance that university workers attached to some verbal and non-verbal components of language. One of the findings is that language fluency was considered the most important verbal language component for workplace peacefulness. This coheres with studies that associated fluency with cultural competence and occupational peacefulness [13]; [14]; [15]. [16]. A possible explanation of the premium university workers placed on fluency is that, firstly, English is a lingua franca in Nigeria and the language of academic engagements and social interactions. Secondly, certain mastery of the language and versatility in its use could

facilitate congenial conversations among colleagues. A fluent speaker may be found pleasing especially if the fluency is deployed for positive communication. Those who possess near-native eloquence or speak with the "received pronunciation" are often respected and preferred [21]; [20]. Therefore, facility and proficiency in the use of the English language could translate into peace in the workplace.

The findings further showed that to university workers, whether junior, senior or of equal rank, the three most important non-verbal workplace communication components were politeness, attentiveness and greetings. The findings support earlier studies such as Weeks [30], Aly, et al. [31], and Lee and Kim [42] that show that workers, irrespective of culture, value a civil workplace and politeness. It seems that human society, the university no less, value politeness or civility. It shows humans want to be respected even as they respect others. A polite person would show sensitivity to the feelings and dignity of the others. Where politeness thrives, mutual respect is likely to thrive and peacefulness would be the outcome.

With regard to the research question on types of social interaction university workers value, the findings show that exchanging phone calls was the most preferred, as 90 percent of the respondents chose that option. This was closely followed by attending colleagues' social events like birthdays, weddings, etc. In the Nigerian setting, visiting someone at home or in the office denotes closeness and intimacy. The findings, therefore, cohere with studies that found that social interactions reduce conflicts [75], provide emotional support [76], a more cohesive and productive work environment [77], and a positive organizational culture [78].

A possible reason most university workers preferred the exchange of phone calls and attendance at colleagues' ceremonies could be that frequent phone calls and visits can help colleagues get to know one another on a more personal level and build relationships, trust, empathy and understanding. Also, regular phone calls and visits can help co-workers communicate more effectively. Thus, when people communicate more frequently, they are less likely to make assumptions and more likely to clarify any misunderstandings before they escalate into conflicts.

Regarding how communication could cause workplace harmony, the findings indicate that effective communication, characterized by politeness, clarity, and respect, plays a crucial role in promoting peace and harmony in the workplace. Also, proper understanding, active listening, and seeking clarifications in order to avoid misinterpretation were identified as essential components of communication that foster positive relationships and prevent conflicts. It is evident that

CONCLUSIONS

Peace speaks a unique language that is effective and affective. Within the Nigerian academic community, where the lingua franca is English, language is not only the means of teaching and research, it is also the means of interacting and relating with one another at work. Language manifests as verbal and non-verbal. Since workplace peacefulness is necessary for workplace productivity, it is important to study those verbal and nonverbal communication components that are contextually related to peace in the workplace. The findings showed that university staff considered fluency in English, politeness, attentiveness, as well as exchange of phone calls, and attendance at colleagues' ceremonies critical to workplace peacefulness. The study, therefore, concludes that university workplace peacefulness could be the outcome of verbal and nonverbal communication construction and deployment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1.   Immediacy skills can be learned. Therefore, it might be in the interest of institutions to provide immediacy training to their workers. Especially in the university, such training can equip both faculty and staff with the requisite relational skills for effective workplace peace negotiations.

2.   Civility training may be required for both faculty and staff. As a follow-up, there should be a civility code in

the university. Whether or not people behave civilly with one another should not be left to their whims. There should be documented civility expectations as well as sanctions for a breach so that civility can be seen as an institutional requirement and personnel responsibility.

3. To promote positive workplace relationships through greetings, organizations can implement several strategies. One strategy is to encourage personalised greetings that convey interest and respect for co-workers. For example, employees can be trained to use a co-worker's name when greeting them or ask about their interests outside of work. Another strategy is to promote cross-cultural understanding and awareness of different greeting practices. For instance, organisations can provide cultural sensitivity training to employees to help them understand and respect different cultural norms.

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Conflict of interest

None

Authors' contributions

1. Louisa Etebom Uwatt: Conceptualised the study, reviewed the final draft, presented the study proposal at a conference for peer review.

2. Alexander Essien Timothy: Developed the concept, designed the instrument, collected data, analysed the data assembled and reviewed the literature, Composed the final draft,

3. Eucharia Obiekezie: Reviewed the literature, proofread the work,

4. Vincent Ugah Uguma; Reviewed the literature, proofread the work

5. Virginia Emmanuel Ironbar: Assisted in the design of the instrument, data collection

6. Gladys Ukume: Reviewed the literature, proofread the work

Ethical considerations: The participants' informed consents were obtained. Their anonymity was guaranteed and maintained. Therefore, no names or email addresses were required of the participants. The Faculty Ethical Review Board of the authors' university examined the instrument and approved the research and provided a written clearance that the study would not breach the rights of the participants.

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