

# The Role of Body Language in Enhancing Verbal Communication

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**Abstract:** The majority of linguists agree that language is a vital means of communication among human beings of diverse ages, tribes, backgrounds, religions, cultures, and genders. While verbal communication serves as the primary medium for exchanging ideas, its effectiveness significantly increases when paired with body language. Nonverbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, and eye contact, enrich verbal interactions by conveying emotions and adding depth to messages. This integration allows for a more comprehensive and empathetic connection between individuals, helping to bridge gaps in understanding and fostering mutual respect.

In this study, 42 participants were involved , comprising 11 males and 32 females of various nationalities and age groups . This article aims to investigate the following key points:

At the beginning, the crucial role of body language in enhancing verbal communication, including how it reinforces spoken words and clarifies intent. Secondly, the influence of cultural differences on the interpretation of body language, highlighting the potential for misunderstandings in cross-cultural settings. Finally, strategies for appropriately interpreting body language cues during conversations to ensure effective and meaningful communication between human beings.

## INTRODUCTION

Body language plays a vital role in enhancing verbal communication. While some individuals emphasize the importance of spoken words, others recognize the significant contribution of nonverbal cues in conveying meaning and maintaining engagement. Nonverbal signals, such as tone, posture, gestures, and eye contact, often add essential context and emotional emphasis that spoken

words alone may not fully deliver. This dynamic is particularly evident in settings like lectures or professional interactions, where visual cues complement verbal communication to ensure clarity and understanding. The reliance on nonverbal cues stems from the human brain's remarkable ability to process visual information rapidly. Nonverbal signals provide immediate emotional and contextual clarity, making them indispensable in effective communication across diverse settings.

Studies suggest that spoken language constitutes only a fraction of communication, with nonverbal elements, including gesture facial expressions, and intonation, forming the majority. However, the role of body language extends beyond individual interactions and has substantial importance in professional, social, and cultural contexts. Furthermore, body language is not universally understood, as cultural differences significantly influence its interpretation. Gestures or expressions that signify approval in one culture may carry entirely different meanings in another, underscoring the need for cultural awareness when interpreting nonverbal communication.

This paper explores the importance of body language, its role in enhancing verbal communication, and the potential for misinterpretation due to cultural variations. By examining these elements, it aims to highlight the significance of body language in fostering effective and meaningful communication, especially in an increasingly interconnected world.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of the term Body Language:

Body language is a form of non-verbal communication where gestures, postures, facial expressions and movement convey emotions, attitudes and intentions that operates as a universal yet culturally nuanced tool for interactions, offering insight into a person's beyond words. Mehrabian, A. (1971).

Knapp, M.L. (2010) defined it as "A form of non-verbal communication that includes postures, gestures, facial expressions, and the eye movements as means of transmitting information between individuals."

"The process of using physical behaviors, rather than words, to express or convey information, including movements of body, face, and eyes," Mehrabian, A. (1972).

Cambridge Dictionary defines the term "body language" as "the nonverbal signals expressed through gestures, facial expressions, posture, and physical movements to communicate a person's thoughts and emotions."

Communication is a multifaceted process involving verbal and nonverbal elements. Among nonverbal elements, body language plays a vital role in reinforcing, complementing, or sometimes even interfering verbal communication.

There are many definitions but we have chosen the above mentioned ones which we found suitable for the article topic.

II. Theoretical Perspective

In the field of Body Language theories, Bandura (1977) figured, social Learning theory assumes that individuals learn behaviors by observing and imitating others. In the context of body language, people adapt their non-verbal cues based on societal norms and interactions. Furthermore, Goleman(1995) spoke about Emotional Intelligence Theory that involves recognizing and managing one's emotions while understanding others'. Body language plays a critical role in decoding emotions, enhancing interpersonal relationships and improving communication effectiveness.

### III. Importance of Body Language in enhancing Verbal Communication

Body language plays a vital role in enhancing verbal communication. It helps convey emotions, clarify intentions, reinforce verbal messages, and making communication more effective and engaging.

Mehrabian, A. (1972) stated that Body language acts as a visual aid to spoken words, providing additional clarity and ensuring the message is understood as intended. For instance, nodding while saying "yes" reinforces the agreement.

Also, Ekman, P. (2003) assured that, non-verbal cues often reveal emotions more authentically than words. A smile communicates happiness, while crossed arms may indicate defensiveness or discomfort. Such expressions build emotional connections during conversations.

However, Burgoon, J. K. et al (2016) clarify that Body language is crucial in establishing trust because it communicates more honestly and transparently than words. While verbal communication can be rehearsed or manipulated, nonverbal clues such as posture, facial expressions, and gestures are often subconscious and reveal a person's genuine emotions.

Research on non-verbal communication emphasizes that body language often carries more communicative weight than verbal elements. For example, Mehrabian (1971) discovered that body language accounts for 55% of the overall communication message interpretation, compared to tone (38%) and verbal content (7%). This highlights the central role of non-verbal cues in creating meaning during communication.

In addition to, for most, communication predominantly occurs through spoken or written language, body language plays a crucial role in reflecting emotions, attitudes, and psychological states Argyle (1988). Goffman (1967) explains that, Body language significantly influences interpersonal dynamics as it involves non-verbal mannerisms and gestures that often affect others more deeply than words.

Moreover, Birdwhistell (1970) added that, the effective communication skills, enhanced by an understanding of body language, enable individuals positively to influence others' emotions and perceptions. This is particularly relevant in applied fields like psychology, sociology, and management, where studies highlight the critical role of body language in leadership and interpersonal effectiveness.

Furthermore, Body Language's function extends beyond verbal messages to reflect cultural and social norms. Non-verbal cues like personal space, gestures, and eye contact differs by culture. Hall's (1966) study on proxemics, for example,

shows that physical distance preferences differ across societies, affecting perceptions of friendliness or respect. Thus, understanding body language in daily interaction is very important not only for effective communication but also for navigating complex social environments.

There are many studies conducted previously which support the importance of body language in speech, we will discuss here some of them:

One of the studies conducted in this area was Goldin - Meadow et al (2007) study which explored how teachers' gestures enhanced students' understanding of complex concepts. They found that students who were taught using a combination of verbal explanations and gestures performed significantly better on comprehension tests compared to those who received only verbal instruction. Accordingly, this study highlights the importance of using complementary body language to reinforce verbal communication in educational settings. Another study of Mast (2007) carried out a research project that investigated how physicians' body language affected patient satisfaction and trust. He found that patients responded positively to open postures, nodding, and eye contact, which made them feel more heard and understood. Conversely, closed postures and lack of eye contact reduced patient trust. This case highlights how body language can significantly influence interpersonal dynamics in healthcare settings.

A field experiment conducted by Mehrabian (1971) evaluated how speakers' non-verbal behaviors impacted audience engagement during presentations. He discovered that, speakers who employed open gestures, maintained eye contact, and had upright posture were rated as more persuasive and credible. This study demonstrates the critical role of body language in enhancing public speaking effectiveness.

#### IV. Body Language in different cultures of the world

Body language plays a crucial role in human communication, often conveying more than spoken words. However, its interpretation varies widely across different cultures (Pease & Pease, 2004). Understanding these differences can help prevent misunderstandings when interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, below are some key concepts of body language in various cultures.

##### a. Gestures and their meanings

Gestures carry diverse meanings across cultures. For example, a thumbs-up is a sign of approval in Western cultures but may be considered offensive in some Middle Eastern and South Asian regions (Matsumoto, 2006). Similarly, while nodding usually signifies agreement, in Bulgaria and Greece, it can mean disagreement (Hall, 1966).

##### b. Eye Contact

The role of eye contact varies significantly. In Western cultures, maintaining direct eye contact is often seen as a sign of confidence and sincerity. Conversely, in some Asian and African cultures, prolonged eye contact might be perceived as confrontational or disrespectful (Goman, 2011). Middle Eastern Cultures,

prolonged eye contact is viewed as a sign of respect, while in others, it can indicate hostility or aggression (Samovar et al., 2017).

c. Handshakes

Handshakes are a widely recognized form of greetings in Western countries, symbolizing respect and equality. However, in some Asian cultures, a bow or a light handshake is preferred as it aligns with their values of humility and modesty (Pease & Pease, 2004).

d. Personal Space

Cultural attitudes toward personal space also vary. North Americans and Europeans generally maintain more personal distance during conversations, whereas Latin American and Middle Eastern cultures prefer closer proximity, which reflects their warmth and openness (Hall, 1966).

e. Facial Expressions

Facial expressions are universal yet interpreted differently. Smiling is often associated with friendliness, but in Japan, excessive smiling can be seen as insincere (Matsumoto, 2006). In Mediterranean cultures, animated facial expressions are frequently used to emphasize points (Pease & Pease, 2004).

f. Cultural Nuances in Posture

Posture can also communicate to either mean respect or disrespect. For instance, sitting cross-legged might be acceptable in Western societies but could be viewed as disrespectful in some Asian and Middle Eastern contexts. Similarly, slouching might indicate disinterest or laziness, depending on cultural norms (Goman, 2011).

Different cultures have different ways of making non-verbal communication and different people have different gestures of conveying their expressions. However, nonverbal communication, like traffic, is not random; it has a purpose and there are common rules to guide its flow. Learning the different common rules of body language in different cultures is very useful for us to understand each other better. As William Shakespeare said: "There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip".

In the field of the differing concepts of body language across cultures, extensive studies have been conducted, and we are going to mention some of them here:

Schug et al. (2010) examined the role of non-verbal communication, such as posture and eye contact, in business negotiations between American and Japanese professionals. The findings of his study was that, Japanese negotiators relied heavily on nonverbal cues, while Americans focused more on verbal content. Misalignment in body language often led to misunderstandings and reduced trust. This case underscores the cultural nuances of body language in professional communication.

Another study by Fatma Ozuorcun (2013) analyzed intercultural communication among university students from different nationalities. One of her findings was misinterpretations of body language, such as gestures or eye contact, frequently caused communication breakdowns. So, awareness of

cultural differences play an crucial role in improving mutual understanding and highlights the importance of cultural awareness in decoding body language.

## METHODOLOGY, DATA ANALYSIS & RESULT DISCUSSION

This part describes the methodology used to explore the role of body language .To begin with the description of subjects ( 1.1 ) related to age (1.2 ) , gender (1.3 ) , occupation (1.4), and nationality (1.5 ) , data collecting instruments ( II ) , and the procedures followed in data collection ( III ) are presented. Then , the results of the questionnaire are tabulated , analysed , and discussed.

### I. Methods

#### Subjects

The sample for the study was drawn from university students, physicians , and university teaching staff. The sample consists of a total of 42 participants . Concerning the age , gender , occupation and nationality were as follows :

Diagram 1.2 Distribution of participants according to age

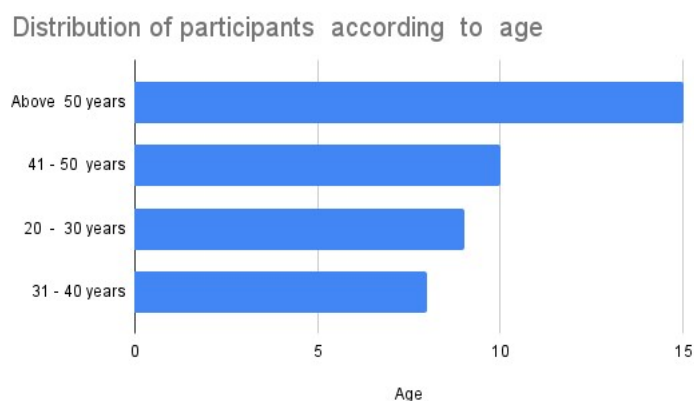


Table 1.3 Distribution of participants according to gender

Sex	No. of Participants	Percentage
Male	11	26.2%
Female	31	73.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100%</b>

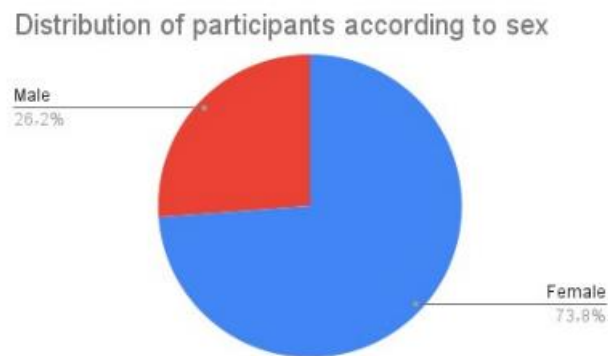
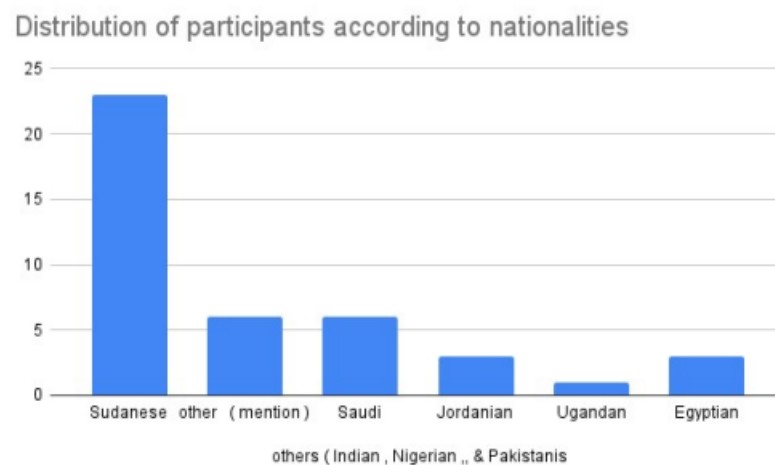


Diagram 1.5 Distribution of participants according to nationality



### Measuring Instrument

The measuring instrument used for collecting data for this study is a questionnaire . The questionnaire consists of six sections ; Firstly , it dealt with demographic information . Secondly , concerned with perception of body language ( included three (3) questions 5-7 ) . Thirdly , dealt with personal experiences with body language consisted of three questions from 8-10. Fourthly , focused on interpretations and reactions to body language , included seven questions from 11- 17 . While the fifths section relied on body language across culture , consisted of three questions 18-20 . The last section dealt with attitudes towards non- verbal communication which consisted of three questions from 21 -23.

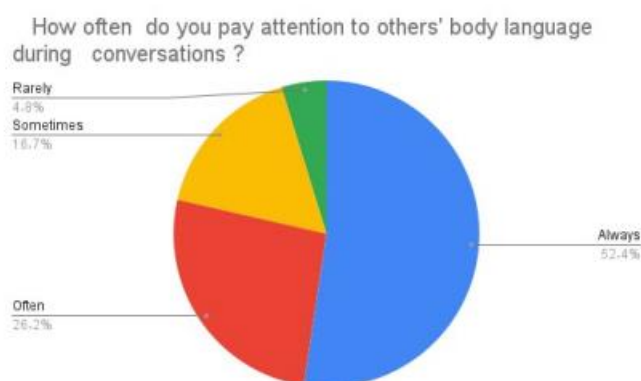
### III . Procedures

The questionnaire was designed through Google forms and sent directly to the participants via various ways such as emails , WhatsApp , and text messages . Free time were given to the participants to fill in the questionnaire. The participants were informed before filling in the questionnaire that the results of the questionnaire will contribute to the improvement of English Language and that their responses would not be disclosed to anyone except the researchers. The data we got from the questionnaire were computed and analyzed by using Google forms. The results were tabulated , discussed and appended to this article . Having described

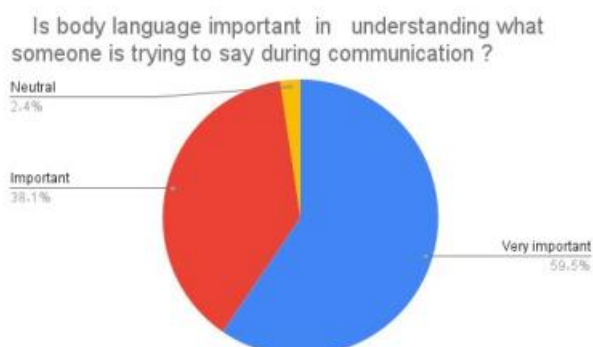
the methodology used in the study , let us turn now to the analysis of the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part deals with the analysis of the data . Regarding the frequency and percentage of each statement in the part of the questionnaire that deals with “ Perception of the body language “ . Question 5 “How often do you pay attention to others’ body language during conversations ? “ 22 of the participants had chosen always 52.4% , while 11 chose Often represented 26.2% , the option sometimes was chosen by only 7 participants 16.7% , 2 participants had chosen rarely 4.8% , and none of the participants had chosen never. The responses indicated that participants pay attention to others’ body language conversations.



Responses to question ( 6 ) “Is body language important in understanding what someone is trying to say during communication? “ are as follows very important received the highest response 59.5% ( 25 ), 16 participants had chosen important represented 38.1% , however , this was an indicator that body language was important in understanding someone during communication . Only one participant( 2.4%) chose neutral



Concerning the question (7) “In your opinion, which of the following body language cues are the most influential in everyday communication (select up to 3). According to the participants responses facial expressions represented the highest percentage 83.3% , next eye contact received 66.7% , then tone of the

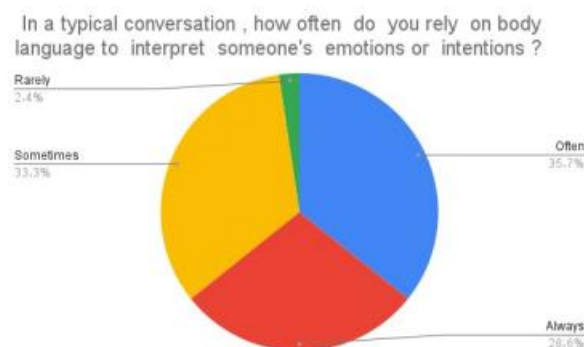


voice 64.3% , hand gestures reached 28.6% , while posture represented 7.1% and proxemics represented the lowest percentage 4.8% . The results indicated that body language cues are the most influential in everyday communication.

Regarding the third section of the questionnaire which is about personal experiences with body language. The first question in this part “ How often do you find yourself consciously using body language to emphasize or clarify your points ? “ 11 participants responded always which represented 26.2% , while 19 responded often which represented 45.2% , 10 participants had chosen sometimes which represented 23.8% and only two participants responded to rarely (4.8%) , and none of the participant had chosen never. Therefore, the results indicate that body language was used consciously.



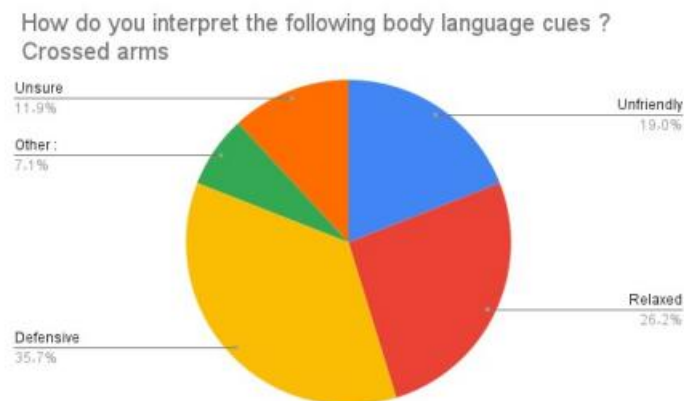
Question 9 “ In a typical conversation , how often do you rely on body language to interpret someone’s emotions or intentions ? “ the responses of the participants were as follows; 12 participants had chosen always (28.6% ) , 15 chose often (35.7%), 14 chose sometimes (33.3%) , only one participant had chosen rarely ( 2.4% ) and none of the participant had chosen never. The conclusion of the participants indicated that they all rely on body language in order to interpret someone’s emotions.



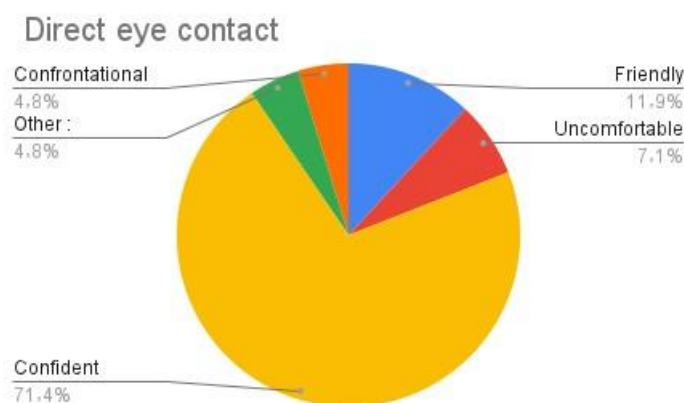
Responses of question 10 “ Think about a time when body language significantly influenced your perception of a person .” All participants described a specific situation of various body language cues that influenced the person perception.

Dealing with part 4 Interpretations and reactions to body language. Question 11 “How do you interpret the following body language cues? Crossed arms 15 participants ( 35.7%) responded to it as defensive, 11 participants (26.2%) as relaxed , 8 participants (19%) as unfriendly , 5 participants (11.9%) were unsure, and while 3 participants ( 3.1%) have chosen other than the mentioned options

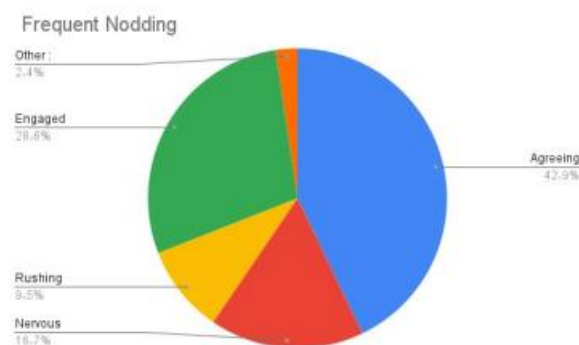
.This was a reflection of various interpretations depending on the culture and backgrounds of the participants.



Concerning the interpretation of “ Direct eye contact “ 30 participants ( 71.4%) selected confident , 5 participants ( 11.9 %) chose friendly , 3 participants (7.1%) chose uncomfortable,2 participants (4.8%) selected confrontational as well as 2 others chose the option ‘other’.

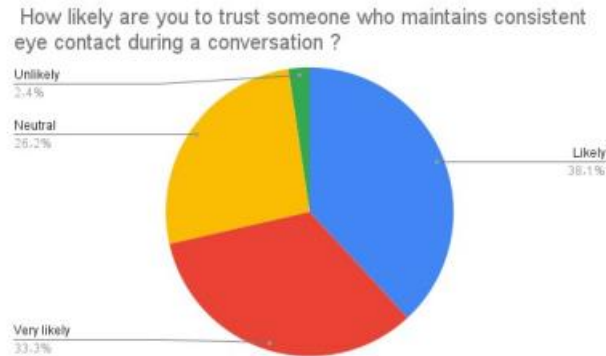


Regarding “ Frequent nodding “ 18 participants( 42.8%) revealed that they interpreted agreeing , 12 participants ( 28.6%) chose engaged , 4 participants(9.5%) expressed rushing , 7 participants (16.7%) showed nervousness , while only one participant chose other . As a result all responses revealed different explanation and reaction to body language.



Question 14 “ How likely are you to trust someone who maintains consistent eye contact during conversation ” 14 participants (33.3%) chose very likely , 16

participants (38.1%) selected likely, so about 71.4% of the participants chose were between very likely (33.3%) and likely (38.1%). 11 participants (26.2%) chose neutral, only one participant (2.4%) chose unlikely and none of the participants chose very unlikely.

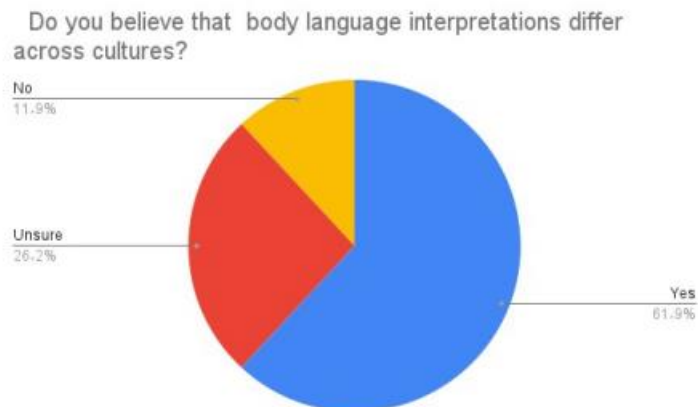


Responses to question (15) “How do you typically react when someone uses the following body language during a conversation? “ Looking away frequently show that majority of the participants stated that they should stop the conversation but only one participant responded friendly.

Question (16) “standing very close to you” participants reaction towards that expressed the following reactions 39 participants between uncomfortable feelings, and keeping a distance while speaking, one participant left the conversation or in other words stopped the conversation and two participants expressed that carefulness should be taken.

Question (17) is about using hand gestures frequently 38 participants expressed that it enhanced the conversation, while three participants felt nervous with the usage of hand gestures frequently and one participant expressed that it was considered a habitual actions.

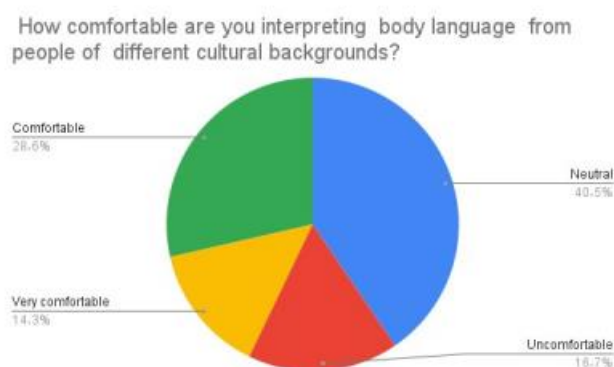
Question (18) which relates to part five about body language across culture “Do you believe that bodylanguage interpretations differ across cultures?” shows that 26 participants (61.9) believed that body language interpretations differ across culture, only five (11.9%) responded no, and 11 participants (26.2)



were unsure.

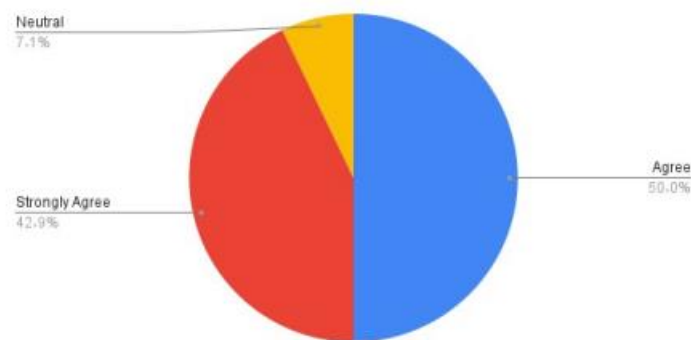
Question (19) deal with those who responded yes to give examples with their various interpretations across culture , for example eye contact between male and female in Islam and to some traditions and cultures were unacceptable while in European cultures it is acceptable . Another example when kneeling or bowing in some African cultures it is a sign of greeting while in other cultures is related to humiliating a person and in Arab countries it is reserved solely for prayer and worship of God. However , Nodding the head in Arab and Western countries is a sign of yes and agreement, while in Bulgaria this gesture means no , while in Japan and China, where bowing is a gesture of respect and reverence. Also , If you want to say I did the job. Some people nod their head, others used their hands. Furthermore , crossing arms in my culture it's not a bad thing but in America it is considered offensive. These examples reflected that body language interpretations differ across cultures .Therefore , is good to learn the culture of the country we are staying in in order to communicate non-verbally in an effective way and not to fall on problems between communicators .

Concerning question 20 deals with “ How comfortable are you interpreting body language from people of different cultural backgrounds ? “ . 6 participants ( 14.3% ) responded very comfortable , 12 participants ( 28.6%) responded comfortably , 17 participants ( 40.5%) responded neutral and only seven ( 16.7% ) responded uncomfortably.



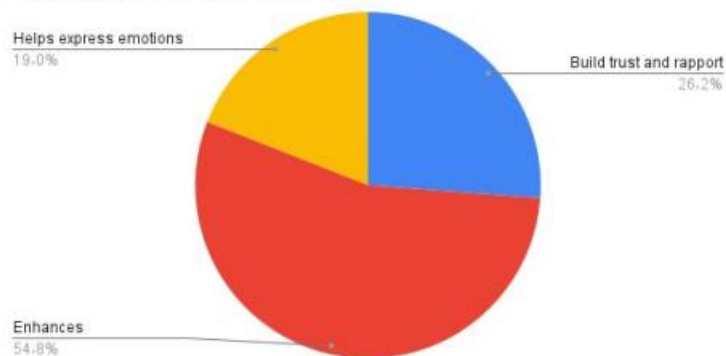
Regarding the six part of the questionnaire which deal with three questions related to attitudes toward non-verbal communication . Question (21) “ Do you think body language is an important as verbal language in effective communication ?” , the participant responses show that about 39 participants ( 92.9%) that body language is an important as verbal language to communicate effectively , they have chosen between strongly agree ( 18 participants / 42.9% ) and agree ( 21 participants / 50% ) , only three participants ( 7.1 % ) responded neutral , and none of the participants responded to the options of strongly disagree or disagree.

Do you think body language is as important as verbal language in effective communication?

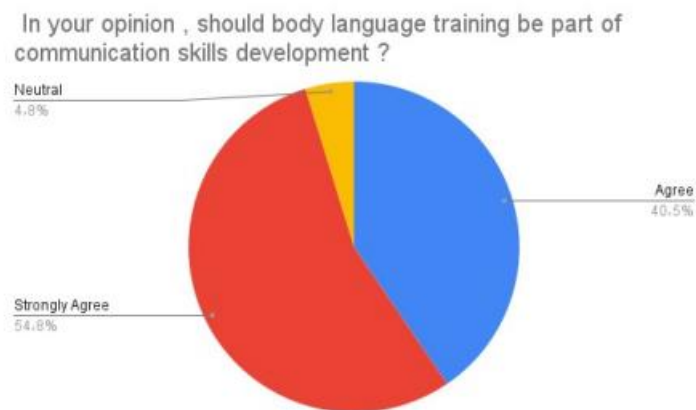


Question (22) “ What do you believe is the biggest advantage of using body language in communication ? “ 23 participants ( 54.8%) responses indicate that body language enhances understanding , while 11 participants (26.2%) responses show building trust and rapport , and 8 participants ( 19% ) show that body language helps to express emotions.

What do you believe is the biggest advantage of using body language in communication ?



Responses to Question (23) “ In your opinion , should body language training be part of communication skills development ? “ 23 participants ( 54.8%) strongly agree that body language training should be part of communication skills development , 17 participants ( 40.5%) agreed that body language training is important in communication skills development , only 2 participants (4.8%) responded neutral , and none of the participant had chosen the options of strongly disagree and disagree.



## CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FURTHER STUDIES

One of the findings of this paper is that body language is very important and should be used side by side with the verbal communication. However, another result is that body language interpretations differ from one culture to another, so to avoid misunderstanding any person living in another country s/he has to learn more about the various interpretations of body language in the country where s/he lives. In addition to, another finding is that religion plays a vital role in the interpretations of some body language cues such as "direct eye contact" and "standing very close" in particular between a male and female in Islam are both forbidden.

The present study recommends that further researches should be conducted for instance, develop training programs to enhance awareness of body language in professional and personal contexts. In addition, to promote cultural sensitivity by educating individuals on variations in non-verbal communication across cultures. However, there are factors that affect the body language cues interpretations which need to be investigated for instance religion and go forward to compare between two religions in order to enhance effective non-verbal communication among communicators of different backgrounds. Also, body language psychology can be recognized as unconscious communication this is the time to encourage further interdisciplinary research combinations of various fields of sociology, psychology and communication studies to deepen our understanding of body language. Furthermore, integrate body language studies within educational curricula to improve interpersonal skills. And lastly utilizing technology since the world is approaching towards technology such as using Artificial intelligence (AI) and video analysis to be involved in advance research methodologies and applications in real-world scenarios.

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