RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND STUDENTS' ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Students are more likely to be influenced by their social environment that affects their behaviour, cognitive, emotion as well as their lifestyles. The influence from social environment will eventually mould the students' personality. Students' positive personality can be developed by having interpersonal communication competence which plays important role in developing positive psychological aspect among them. This study aims to understand the relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students. A set of questionnaire was used to gather relevant information of interpersonal communication and assertive behaviour of 152 students from one premier school in Kuala Lipis, Pahang. Findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour. Apart from that, findings also reveal that there is a gender difference on interpersonal communication's competence and assertive behaviour. Several limitations and suggestions were also discussed.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, communication competence, communication skills, assertive behaviour.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour are ideal combination in shaping positive personality among students. With positive personality, students will become a valuable asset as future generation leader. According to Fisher and Adams

(1994), interpersonal communication competence develops empathy behaviour which enables individual to understand and respond to other person's feelings. If the empathy development can help to foster good communication and behaviour, more efforts must be done to mould students' personality since early schools day.

In realizing the benefit of interpersonal communication competence, it is crucial to emphasize on the importance of communication among students. Furthermore, it is also necessary to expose secondary school students on how to be more assertive. With assertive behaviour, students will be equipped with positive personality and high self-esteem which is a very valuable asset for them to face the challenges in their future life.

This paper will discuss on Spitzberg and Cupach's Interpersonal Communication Competence Theory as the main reference of this study. Interpersonal Communication Competence Theory by Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) explains an individual capability to behave appropriately and effectively based on the situation of the communication process. This kind of competence enables individual to achieve the communication goals without giving any harm to other person involved in the particular communication process. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) describe three main components of communication in his theory which includes knowledge, skills and motivation as shown in Figure 1. The component model demonstrates on how the three components work in order to facilitate effective communication and capability to adapt on different situation in fulfilling the communication satisfaction. Knowledge refers to individual's capability of identifying the most appropriate behaviour during the communication process within particular situation. While skills reflect on individual's capability of using appropriate behaviour while communicating with other person. Motivation is the personal desire to communicate competitively. These three components works hand in hand with each other to establish interpersonal communication competence.

KNOWLEDGE ⟷ SKILLS ⟷ MOTIVATION
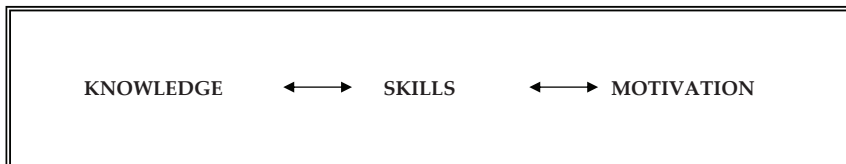
Figure 1: Component Model Three Parts of Interpersonal
Communication Competence
Source: Spitzberg & Cupach (1984)

To conceptualize the Interpersonal Communication Competence Theory, researcher analyzes few arguments from previous studies related to communication competence. Based on the analysis, researcher combines few conceptual definitions including relationship, communication competence and interpersonal communication competence. Various perspectives need to be considered in developing theory of communication competence such as goals achievements, relationship communication, adaptive behaviour, responsibilities and sensitivity. In regard of this matter, it is essential to concentrate on communication and interaction elements as social reality and sensory development.

1.1   Problem Statement

Interpersonal communication competence is one of the important medium in ensuring positive psychological development among secondary school students. Communication skills indirectly influence the development of assertive behaviour. Rathus (1973) explains that assertive behaviour embraces three communication elements which is behaviour in giving suggestion, interaction and relationship as well as nonverbal language.

One of the issues arises by International Advisory Panel (IAP) during Multimedia Super Coridor in May 19th 2007 is regarding the higher education students who lack of courage to ask question, not assertive in defending their own ideas as well as not having good analytical skill as compared to the international students. This scenario exists in higher education institution even though students are exposed to communication competence process during secondary school. Moreover, national education's mission and vision has emphasized on this aspect in planning curriculum and co-curriculum activities for secondary schools. However, exposure on communication competence and proper planning of activities in school failed to develop assertive behaviour among higher education students (Mustapha, 2007).

Generally, students are surrounded by social environment and interact with others through interpersonal communication. Student's communication atmosphere is divided into several layers which contains school environment (student and teacher), home environment (student and family members) and community environment (student, peers and public). Student's relationship with others will influence their lifestyle as results of social interest and individual activity level. This kind of interaction will emerge into empathy (caring for others) and develop expression towards social achievement. Activity level

is individual's energy rate on handling problems within his social environment. This concept explains the importance as a benchmark towards a healthy psychological behaviour.

Besides that, researcher interested to examine the relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour. Every student has unique backgrounds that will influence their personality development which include gender differences. Assertive behaviour gradually develops through social interaction process within various students' social environment and cross culture factor in which the lifestyle are different from one another. For example, during a discussion in class, not everything discussed will be agreed by all students. Few students may agree on the particular arguments but the rest might have different opinions. An assertive student will state his disagreement, express doubt positively and change opinion if necessary (Noraini, 2001).

Following are the research questions developed in this study:

1. Does interpersonal communication competence influence assertive behaviour among secondary school students?
2. Is there any difference in interpersonal communication competence between male and female students?
3. Is there any difference in assertive behaviour among between male and female students?

1.2   Study Objectives

The aims of this study are to:

1. investigate relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students.
2. determine gender differences in interpersonal communication competence among secondary school students.
3. determine gender differences in assertive behaviour among secondary school students.

1.3   Hypotheses

H01   :   There is no significant relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students.

H02   :   There is no significant difference in interpersonal communication competence between male and female students.
H03   :   There is no significant difference in assertive behaviour between male and female students.

1.4   Significance Of Study

This study will provide an understanding and knowledge on influences of interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students. Findings from this study may serve as a guideline for future researchers in expanding the research scope in communication and human behaviour. Apart from that, this study also significant to school management as it helps the school administrator to realize the importance of mastery effective communication and its influences on students' assertive behaviour. Realizing the importance of effective communication and assertive behaviour among students will encourage the school administration to put in more efforts in shaping students' personality.

2.0   METHODOLOGY

In this study, correlational design was used by the researcher to determine the relationship between two variables; interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour. Simple random sampling was used as sampling technique. Out of 250 Form Four students in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Clifford, Kuala Lipis, 152 of them were randomly selected to participate in this study. Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Clifford was chosen because of it is established as "premier school" by Ministry of Education (MOE) in 1996. This school was then adopted as Special School Model by MOE in 1996 which comprises of form 4 until form upper 6 students. Beginning of year 2006, this school was selected as one of the smart schools in Smart School Expansion Project Phase I in Pahang.

A set of questionnaire used as and instrument to for data collect purpose. The questionnaire consists of three parts: Part A: Student's Personal Backgrounds, Part B: Spitzberg & Cupach's Interpersonal Communication Competence (Self-assessment), and Part C: Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS). The items in Part A were developed by researcher, while items in Part B were adapted from Spitzberg & Cupach's Interpersonal Communication Competence to measure students interpersonal communication competence. The items in Part C were adapted from the Schedule for Assessing Assertive Behaviour by Rathus A. Spencer (1973) to measure students' assertive behaviour.

3.0   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Frequency of respondent by gender (N=152)

Variable	N	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	76	50.0
Female	76	50.0

The above table shows the frequency of respondent participated in this study. The sample size is 152 form four students whereby 76 male students and 76 female students.

$H_0 1$	:	There is no significant relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students.

Table 2: Correlation between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour

Variable	Interpersonal communication competence	
	r	p
Assertive behaviour	.441**	.04

**p < 0.01

Based on Table 2, finding indicates that there is a significant relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students (r = .441, **p < 0.01). Thus, the first hypothesis is rejected. This finding is consistent with study done by Hartley (1999) who found out the significant relationship between the two variables.

$H_0 2$	:	There is no significant difference in interpersonal communication competence between male and female students.

Table 3: Students' interpersonal communication competence based on gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard deviation	*df*	t
Interpersonal communication competence	Male	76	3.3575	.81409	150	-3.090*
	Female	76	3.7259	.64638		

*p < 0.05

Table 3 illustrates the significant difference in interpersonal communication competence between male and female students (t = -3.090, *p <0.05). The mean scores for male and female students are 3.357 and 3.725 respectively. Thus, the second hypothesis is rejected. Similarly, Talley and Richmond (1980) also revealed gender orientation influences in interpersonal communication competence.

H_03 :	There is no significant difference in assertive behaviour between male and female students.

Table 4: Students' assertive behaviour based on gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard deviation	*df*	t
Assertive behaviour	Male	76	.0425	.93741	150	-3.517*
	Female	76	.5311	.76709		

Finding in Table 4 reveals that there is a significant difference in interpersonal communication competence between male and female students (t = -3.517, *p <0.05). The mean scores for male and female students are .0425 and .5311 respectively. Thus, the third hypothesis is rejected. This finding is supported by previous study by Garrison (1983) who found out significant difference in assertive behaviour among male and female.

4.0   DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to investigate interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students. Spitzberg and Cupach's Interpersonal Communication Competence Theory (1984) explains that knowledge, skills and motivation work in collaborative process to establish effective communication. Finding revealed that there is a significant difference in interpersonal communication competence between male and female students. This finding is supported by a study conducted by Talley and Richmond (1980) who found out interpersonal communication competence is influence by gender orientation. They also specify the difference in interpersonal communication style between male and female. The differences in way of thinking and behaving among male and female students indirectly influence their communication style, social interest and individual personality. This is also similar with findings from McCabe and Meller (2004) study who reveal social development which contains assertive behaviour and friendship acceptance are based on good communication competence.

Findings from this study also implied on differences towards assertive behaviour among male and female students. Consistently, previous study conducted by Garrison (1983) showed a difference between male and female students' assertive behaviour. Besides, he further described the increasing of assertive level among female when training is given. This reflected on schooling system which apply teaching and learning process in curriculum and co-curriculum is not sufficient enough to increase assertive behaviour among secondary school students.

5.0 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, interpersonal communication competence influences assertive behaviour among secondary school students. Besides, it is important to note that gender influences interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students. Based on Interpersonal Communication Competence Theory by Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), knowledge, skills, motivation play important role in developing communication competence. Hence indirectly influence assertive behaviour through dominance and influence attitude. This study also provides information for school administration and counsellor in developing students' potential. Thus, knowledge and awareness regarding this matter are needed especially to the school administration in planning effective school activities.

Furthermore, other parties such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Youth and Sports can collaborate with each other to organize various activities in helping students to improve their communication skills and assertive behaviour towards developing ideal personality. With this kind of activities, students are equipped with appropriate aspect that will then improve their soft skills and becoming a reliable future generation leaders.

Several limitations in this study are discussed as well as suggestions for future researchers:

1. In this study, the researcher only investigates gender differences towards interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour. Thus, future research is recommended to explore on how demographic factors such as age, education level, and race can influence interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among students.

2. This study only focus on Spitzberg & Cupach's Theory to explain students' interpersonal communication competence based on the three components; knowledge, skills and motivation. Therefore, future researcher may consider other communication competence criteria such as adaptability, conversational involvement, conversational management, empathy, effectiveness, and appropriateness.

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