



**The Effect of Positive Communication
on Ethiopian University Students'
Interpersonal and Intergroup Relationships:
The Case of Jigjiga University**

**Doctoral Dissertation
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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECT OF POSITIVE COMMUNICATION ON ETHIOPIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' INTERPERSONAL AND INTERGROUP RELATIONSHIPS: THE CASE OF JIGJIGA UNIVERSITY

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This study examined the effects of Positive Communication Program on interpersonal and intergroup relationships of Ethiopian university students. A pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental research approach was used to assess the data received from the participants. This study involved a program piloted and experimented for its potency in boosting positive interpersonal and intergroup relationships among Ethiopian university students. Prior to implementing the program, the Friendship Maintenance scale and General Intergroup Contact Quantity and Contact Quality scale were used to assess the interpersonal and intergroup relationships' levels of the participants ($n=97$: $49_{\text{experimnt}}$ & 48_{control}). Then, an eight-session positive communication training program was tested for its effectiveness in enhancing interpersonal and intergroup relationships. In this quasi-experimental study, positive communication was found to be an effective method for enhancing interpersonal and intergroup relationships and minimizing interactional problems among Ethiopian university students. Therefore, it is suggested that the Positive Communication Program could be implemented to facilitate intergroup relations and reduce conflicts, tensions, and misperceptions among outgroup members. Finally, implications and future directions for research are discussed in light of the findings.

Key words: Positive communication, Interpersonal relationships, Intergroup relationships, Intergroup Conflicts, Ethiopian University Students

ÖZET

ETİYOPYA ÜNİVERSİTESİ ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN KİŞİLER ARASI VE GRUPLARARASI İLİŞKİLERİNE POZİTİF İLETİŞİMİN ETKİSİ: JİGJİGA ÜNİVERSİTESİ ÖRNEĞİ

Abdulatif Hajjismael AHMED

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Bu çalışma, Etiyopyalı üniversite öğrencilerinin kişilerarası ve gruplar arası ilişkilere Pozitif İletişim programının etkililiği sınanmıştır. Katılımcılardan alınan verilerin değerlendirilmesinde öntest-sontest kontrol gruplu yarı deneysel araştırma yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışma, Etiyopyalı üniversite öğrencileri arasında kişilerarası ve gruplar arası pozitif ilişkileri geliştirmedeki potansiyeli için pilot uygulama yapılan ve denenen bir programı içermektedir. Programı uygulamadan önce, katılımcıların (n=97: 49_{deney} ve 48_{kontrol}) kişilerarası ve gruplar arası ilişki düzeylerini ölçmek için Arkadaşlık Sürdürme ölçeği ve Gruplar Arası Temas ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Daha sonra sekiz oturumluk bir pozitif iletişim eğitim programının kişilerarası ve gruplar arası ilişkileri geliştirmedeki etkinliği test edildi. Bu yarı deneysel çalışmada, Etiyopyalı üniversite öğrencileri arasındaki kişiler arası ve gruplar arası ilişkileri geliştirmek ve etkileşim sorunlarını en aza indirmek için pozitif iletişimin etkili bir yöntem olduğu bulundu. Bu nedenle, gruplar arası ilişkileri kolaylaştırmak ve dış grup üyeleri arasındaki çatışmaları, gerilimleri ve yanlış algılamaları azaltmak için Pozitif İletişim Programının uygulanması önerilmektedir. Son olarak, sonuçlara dayalı olarak çalışmanın önerileri ve çıkarımları tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pozitif iletişim, Kişilerarası ilişkiler, Gruplararası ilişkiler, Gruplararası Çatışmalar, Etiyopyalı üniversite öğrencileri

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Halima Ibrahim and father Hajjismael Ahmed, who lovingly fostered and parented me with full reverence but were unable to witness the fruition of my protracted efforts!



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LISTS OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACR:	Active Constructive Responding
APA:	American Psychological Association
APPX:	Appendix
BET:	Behaviour, Effect, and Thank You
CDC:	Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
CMC:	Computer-Mediated Communication
COVID-19:	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CQCQ:	General Intergroup Contact Quantity and contact Quality
DTM:	Displacement Tracking Matrix
FM:	Friendship Maintenance
IDMC:	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDPs:	Internally Displaced Persons
JJU:	Jigjiga University
LARA:	Listen, Affirm, Respond, and Ask questions
PCIP:	Positive Communication Intervention Program
PGD:	Positive Greetings at the Door
SDO:	Social Dominance Orientation
SDT:	Social Dominance Theory
SNNP:	The Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples
SNNPRS:	The Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional State
UPR:	Unconditional Positive Regard
URT:	Uncertainty Reductions Theory
USIP:	United States Institute of Peace
VIA:	Values-in-Action
YTB:	Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı (The Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Human beings are inherently social creatures, and they have a strong need for connection and belonging throughout their lifespan. Relationships are quintessential ingredients for optimal human functioning and survival. Studies show that healthy social interactions and fostering them have innumerable benefits for individuals' physical and mental health including enhancing well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman, 2002; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Considering this important role of relationships, people naturally need to form and maintain healthy social ties in their daily encounters with significant figures in their life including family members, friends, romantic partners, colleagues, teachers, and so on through the process of socialization. However, it is not always easy to make and maintain healthy social ties, especially when coming across new relationships (e.g., at universities or in a new work environment). In such contexts, people may face challenges to maintain positive relationships with the outgroups (those to which they do not belong) because they have already identified themselves with a specific social group (Elemo, 2019).

People identify themselves and others based on their strong emotional ties to a particular social group, as well as the norms and complexities associated with that membership (Tajfel, 1978). Such highly driven self-esteem toward ingroups (the group with whom they identify) would influence not only how individuals perceive and judge themselves and outgroups, but also how they behave, potentially leading to ingroup favouritism and outgroup prejudices. Members of the ingroup who are characterized by such social categorization are more likely to view their own group members positively just because they share common identities, and the members of the outgroup negatively merely because they belong to a group other than theirs (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Such kind of bigoted intergroup evaluation may trigger intergroup biases such as ethnocentrism, prejudice, and discrimination, ultimately leading to conflicts (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002).

Universities are little communities where thousands of emotional and energetic young people from varied socio-cultural backgrounds get along with one another. University students are expected to leave their long-established social groups at home

(e.g., families, friends, etc.) and enter a new social environment where they will live with other groups to which they have not previously belonged (outgroup). University students who were emotionally attached to their ingroups prior to the new relationships may have emotional challenges, adjustment issues, and intergroup conflicts in such scenarios. Empirical research on university students' experiences found that they frequently face major intergroup conflict, which is mostly driven by biased beliefs based on social identity (Gonzalez & Kokozos, 2019) and a lack of intercultural competencies (Ahmed, Hamed & Gocheva, 2020).

Studies conducted on intergroup relations of Ethiopian university students indicate that they have been largely exposed to violence and different outcomes of conflicts. In some extreme cases, life loss and damages to properties have been recorded because of these conflicts, Suspension of education and closure of campuses have been observed, too (Yigzaw & Abitew, 2019). In the Ethiopian context, “higher education institutions are one of the contexts where ethnic tensions and conflicts occur, and there is an increasing concern that they become the major battlefields for ethnic conflict” (Adamu, 2013, p. 79). In most cases, such intergroup tensions are attributed to multifaceted triggering factors ranging from simple interpersonal communication problems to politically motivated ethnic and religious-based intergroup biases and unsubstantiated media manipulations. Moreover, the ethnolinguistic nature of the Ethiopian population makeup and the ethnic-based federalism system upon which current Ethiopia is configured might have laid the foundation for such intergroup disputes (Belay, 2019; Abera, 2018; Ebenezer, 2018; Chekol, Moges, & Nigatu, 2021). Given that higher education institutions are the miniature of the greater society where ethnically diverse, and emotionally energetic young population come together and attend mutual routine practices, it is very likely for the intergroup conflicts to replicate.

The poor communication culture in universities is provoking fearful relationships, gender prejudice (Gullilat, 2006), and interpersonal conflicts among students which in some cases turn out to be intergroup conflicts costing the students to abandon education and campus (Yigzaw & Abitew, 2019). Many of these conflicts have occurred because of a simple misunderstanding between different cultures (individual and/or group members) and could be prevented mainly through effective intercultural communication (Abera, 2010). Even though interpersonal conflicts are a normal segment of daily life and even have some positive aspects, unresolved conflicts are considered negative for they cause

disagreements, stress, social chaos, destruction, and violence between groups unless they are managed effectively (Bazezew & Neka, 2017).

These problems are mostly manifested in dormitories, group works, classes, graffiti, dormitories, and other group gathering scenes (Teshome, 2018). For instance, when a Muslim student wants to pray in a dormitory and a Christian roommate wants to listen to loud religious songs, they feel discomfort holding a grudge. Other good examples could be when students of different social categorizations want to make a welcoming program for the new arriving fresh students, they may quarrel and dispute over the common resources especially when all want to use simultaneously. Such embarrassing conditions would let them to interpersonal conflicts. Here, it is worth noting that though the nature of the conflicts is primarily interpersonal, they overlap with intergroup nature as well (Adamu, 2013; Bazezew & Neka, 2017). Furthermore, the conflicts are mirrored in mediated communication. For example, the politically motivated social media hate speech and unmindful media usage are considered triggering factors that are responsible for fuelling the inter-faith, inter-ethnic polarized conflicts (Chekol, Moges, & Nigatu, 2021).

The consequences/impact of the ethnic and religious-based intergroup conflicts in Ethiopia, especially in Jigjiga city and its vicinity, the study area of the present research, was overstepping bounds, exposing the victims to unfulfilled basic needs, suspended education, family fragmentations, loss of human life and property (Yigzaw & Abitew, 2019). Attributed to the inter-communal violence that initially emerged from this area in the year 2018, Ethiopia experienced one of the worst internal displacements in the world. Evidence shows that more than one million internally displaced people (IDPs) were there in the country breaking the global record of IDPs in 2018 alone (Shaban, 2018; Yigzaw & Abitew, 2019; DTM, 2021; IDMC, 2021). Thus, the reason why JJU (Jigjiga University) was chosen as the study area was that it was the region/area where the prevalence of inter-communal conflict first started and spread with a huge impact.

Having discussed the social interaction trends and challenges in Ethiopia, it is important to examine what prior studies have suggested as a solution to the problem. As said above, even though it is not easy to find empirical studies that particularly examined the role of positive communication related to interpersonal and intergroup relationship problems of university students, scant literature on related topics reveals that good communication and its distinctive forms have a significant role in improving relationships

as well as healing conflicts associated with such social interactions (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003; Rosenberg, 2003; Frey & White, 2012; Pitts & Socha, 2013; Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015; Socha & Beck, 2015; Mirivel, 2019; Socha, 2019).

Therefore, building on the recommendations of previous research, it will be of great importance to explore how positive communication can foster positive relationships and contribute to the resolution of interpersonal conflicts at the personal and group levels among Ethiopian university students. On top of that, it would make sense to design and implement an intervention program with strength-focused approaches that would help students acquire and develop interpersonal skills and intercultural competencies and manage conflict.

Positive communication is an emerging and new branch of communication that studies relational happiness and the subjective well-being of communicators. It is a discipline born out of positive psychology, the latest psychological science that preaches accentuation of the positive aspect of human behaviour and communication (Socha & Beck, 2015). Mirivel (2014) defines positive communication as “any verbal or non-verbal behaviour that functions positively in the course of human interaction” (p, 7). Even though various descriptions and definitions were provided for positive communication by different scholars, almost all of them accentuate the constituent features of positive communication and topics such as gratitude, compassion, empathy, generosity, forgiveness, encouragement, social support, appreciation, playfulness, affection, and virtue (Socha & Pitts, 2012; Socha & Beck, 2015).

There are basic elements that characterize positive communication. Mirivel (2014) identified six principal behaviours as pillars of positive communication claiming that they exemplify positive communication. These behaviours are greeting, asking, complimenting, disclosing, encouraging, and listening. Though these behaviours are not mutually exclusive, each has sufficient details that demand an exclusive explanation. Appreciatively, Mirivel (2014) has explained the six behaviours in detail with related theories and practical implications as well as peculiar exemplary exercises. He also proposed the Model of Positive Communication, which is accepted as a guiding framework in the field, based on the six behaviours in his book *The Art of Positive Communication*.

Apart from the behaviours that exemplify positive communication, there are various positive communication practices or techniques that are considered to facilitate the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. These include gratitude exercise, empathic

listening, active-constructive responding, intergroup dialogue, positive language exercise, positive feedback, Johari window exercise, trust-building exercise, etc. Originally developed by positive psychology scholars (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), most of these techniques were espoused for positive communication practices as they serve a mutual purpose (Socha & Beck, 2015; Mirivel, 2014) of smoothening interpersonal relationships, harnessing negative interpersonal communication, and creating flourished social bonds among individuals with diverse social identities.

Beyond their imperative role in transforming interpersonal relationships, positive communication practices have the potential to ensure the subjective well-being of individuals, happiness, and social justice/change (Muñiz-Velázquez & Pulido, 2019). Even though positive communication is generally seen as an appealing phenomenon of interaction, it remains under-researched from theoretical point of view. Therefore, it is important to refine our understanding of underlying variables and factors by systematically developing conceptual models, and theories of positive communication.

Even though interpersonal and intergroup tensions were widespread at several Ethiopian campuses, including Jigjiga University, adequate research was not undertaken in the latter university. Moreover, the existing record-breaking and unprecedented Ethiopian crisis of internally displaced peoples (IDPs), which was triggered by intergroup conflicts and tensions, originally emanated from this region. Despite their frequent occurrences, these problems have not gained due attention of research and intervention with the premise that studying such sensitive topics may have unpleasant outcomes (Ashebir, 2015) and thus warrant proper and timely interventions.

A few studies have examined issues related to intergroup relations (Adamu, 2013), intergroup bias (Missaye, 2013), ethnocentrism and inter-cultural relations (Mekonnen, 2013), styles of interpersonal conflicts management (Bazezewu & Neka, 2017), ethnic conflicts and mass media (Ebenezer, 2018), disputes over ethnic and religious variety (Abebaw, 2014) intercultural sensitivity (Awol, 2018), and social identity and interpersonal interaction (Teshome, 2018). However, none of them addressed the problems of students' interpersonal and intergroup relations with an intervention-based approach, particularly with positive communication programs. As a result, the primary objective of this study was to develop a positive communication intervention program and examine its effects on improving interpersonal and intergroup relationships in

contexts of Ethiopian university students. In line with the stated problem and purpose set above, the following research questions were forwarded:

1.2. Research Questions

The main objective of this study was to examine the efficacy of the Positive Communication Intervention program in enhancing the interpersonal and intergroup relationships of Ethiopian university students. In order to scrutinize the impact of positive communication on interpersonal and intergroup relationships, the following research questions were formulated:

1.2.1. Research Questions Related to Interpersonal Relationships

- 1) Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the control group's interpersonal relationships at pretest and at posttest?
- 2) Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the experiment group's interpersonal relationships at pretest and at posttest?
- 3) Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the control and experiment group's interpersonal relationships at pretest and at posttest?

1.2.2. Research Questions Related to Intergroup Relationships

- 4) Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the control group's intergroup relationships at pretest and at posttest?
- 5) Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the experiment group's intergroup relationships at pretest and at posttest?
- 6) Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the control and experiment group's intergroup relationships at pretest and at posttest?

1.3. Limitations of the Study

Notwithstanding its notable contributions, this study is not free of limitations. Thus, the findings should be considered with caution and interpreted taking the following limitations into account. The first limitation of the current study is that it employed self-report scales to measure the interpersonal and intergroup relationships of the participants. Despite the fact that the scales have high psychometric qualities, self-report processes are inevitably biased. Thus, using qualitative data to supplement self-administered questionnaires may result in a stronger outcome and a better comprehension of the

intervention. Likewise, these tools were created originally with Western culture in mind. While the adaptation of such measures may inspire cross-cultural studies, the structure and context of the formation of Ethiopian social identity and the context of intergroup formation may differ. As a result, future researchers might think about creating methods that consider cultural backgrounds.

In addition, even though the pilot study was carried out, as per plan, the main study was completed in a relatively short time (the initially planned eight-week schedule was lowered to six weeks) and did not make a follow-up study due to COVID-19 restrictions and political issues. This may restrict the chances of testing the participants' ability to apply what they learnt in the sessions into the real-life situations. Hence, future studies performing follow-up assessments to investigate the long-term impacts of positive communication programs. Furthermore, intense, education-based, semester-long randomized field experiments could produce more reliable outcomes.

Moreover, Ethiopian students pursuing higher education at various Turkish universities were used to pilot the study. Due to the lockdown and travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 outbreak, the positive communication training program was held virtually. Ethiopian students who receive international scholarships are typically well-informed and competitive, hailing primarily from the capital city. These demographic characteristics, on the other hand, were less common in the main study. As a result, future research should consider a comparable setting for both pilot and experimental studies. Finally, the male-female ratio composition was not proportional, which may be due to gender inequality in tertiary education in Ethiopia where girls represent only a quarter of the university population, (Asfaw, 2012, p.1). Hence, Future research is encouraged to consider a more representative ratio.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The present study aims to illuminate how positive communication influences interpersonal relations, revealing the roles it plays in transforming the relationships among university students with different social backgrounds. Owing to its sensitivity and fear of unbearable consequences, intergroup (particularly ethnicity and religion) related topics are least treated/researched in Ethiopia, especially in higher education institutions. Thus, group-based interventional studies are less common in Ethiopian universities. However, the finding of this study revealed how bad the negative intergroup contact and conflicts could impact the students' relational wellness and academic functions.

In this regard, the results of this study could provide insight into the practice of positive communication intervention programs in the treatment of the prevailing intergroup interactive conflicts and the transformation of positive interpersonal and intergroup relationships in the context of Ethiopian university students. Moreover, this interventional study may contribute to the field of interpersonal communication as empirical evidence on the applicability of the positive communication treatment principle in the Ethiopian cultural context. It may also add value to the existing scant literature in the field of positive communication. Finally, it is hoped that these efforts will contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay between the newly emerging positive communication and relational processes.

1.5. Operational Definition of Terms

In order to facilitate clarity and consistency in this study, the following important terminologies have been defined.

Positive communication: “any verbal or non-verbal behavior that functions positively in the course of human interaction” (Mirivel, 2014).

Interpersonal relationship: “the connections and interactions, especially ones that are socially and emotionally significant, between two or more people” (VandenBos, 2007).

Intergroup relations: “Individuals belonging to one group interacting, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group identification...” (Sherif, 1962).

Friendship maintenance: can be defined as “behaviours that individuals engage in to maintain acceptable levels of satisfaction and commitment” within a relationship (Oswald, Clark, & Kelly, 2004, p. 418).

Friendship is defined as “a non-romantic attachment between two or more individuals involving emotional involvement in each other’s personal lives, characterized by mutual trust and self-disclosure” (Semela, 2012).

Intergroup contact “refers to interactions between members of different, often conflicting, social groups” (Ramasubramanian & Costantini, 2020).

Contact quality “relates to the frequency with which someone has direct intergroup encounters” (Lolliot et al., 2015).

Contact quantity “relates to the extent to which face-to-face intergroup encounters are experienced positively or negatively” (Lolliot et al., 2015).

In-group: “in general, any group to which one belongs, or with which one identifies, but particularly a group judged to be different from other groups (outgroups)” (VandenBos, 2007).

Out-group: “in general, any group to which one does not belong, or with which one does not identify” (VandenBos, 2007).

Intergroup conflict: “disagreement or confrontation between two or more groups and their members, such as between work departments, entire companies, political parties, or nations (VandenBos, 2007).



2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Relationships

One of the basic needs of human beings is the innate need for connection and belongingness. Given that they are social creatures, forming and maintaining relationships is essential for human beings' survival. In Abraham Maslow's well-known theory of the hierarchy of human needs, the need for belonging (friendship, intimacy, sense of connection) is posited along with the physiological basic needs such as food, sex, and shelter (Maslow, 1943). Similarly, in his well-being theory, Martin Seligman - the founder of positive psychology- considered positive relationships as one of the basic pillars of well-being (Seligman, 2002).

Most importantly, one of the most relevant findings on this issue is that of Harvard University's longest-running longitudinal study on human development and happiness, which studied what promotes people's happiness and wellness across lifespan. As the director of this over 80-years old study, Robert Waldinger summarizes the whole study in one sentence: "The good life is built with good relationships" (Waldinger, 2015).

Relationships need work to keep up. In other words, maintaining a healthy, fulfilling relationship requires time and work from both partners. In the absence of such attempts, relationships have a tendency to fall apart. Of course, a number of factors may affect whether a relationship continues. Although there may be others, the following are the essential ones. Communication is essential for preserving and enhancing social and personal connections. Canary & Dainton (2003) came up with five relational maintenance strategies: positivity, openness (self-disclosure), assurances, social network, and shared tasks. Additionally, supportiveness (social support), interactions, humour, rewards, self-presentation of good characteristics, faithfulness, honesty, conflict management, and affection are used to start, escalate, and maintain relationships. On the other hand, some situations, such as avoidance, costs, presenting oneself as having negative attributes, and disinterest can cause relationships to end (Canary & Dainton, 2003).

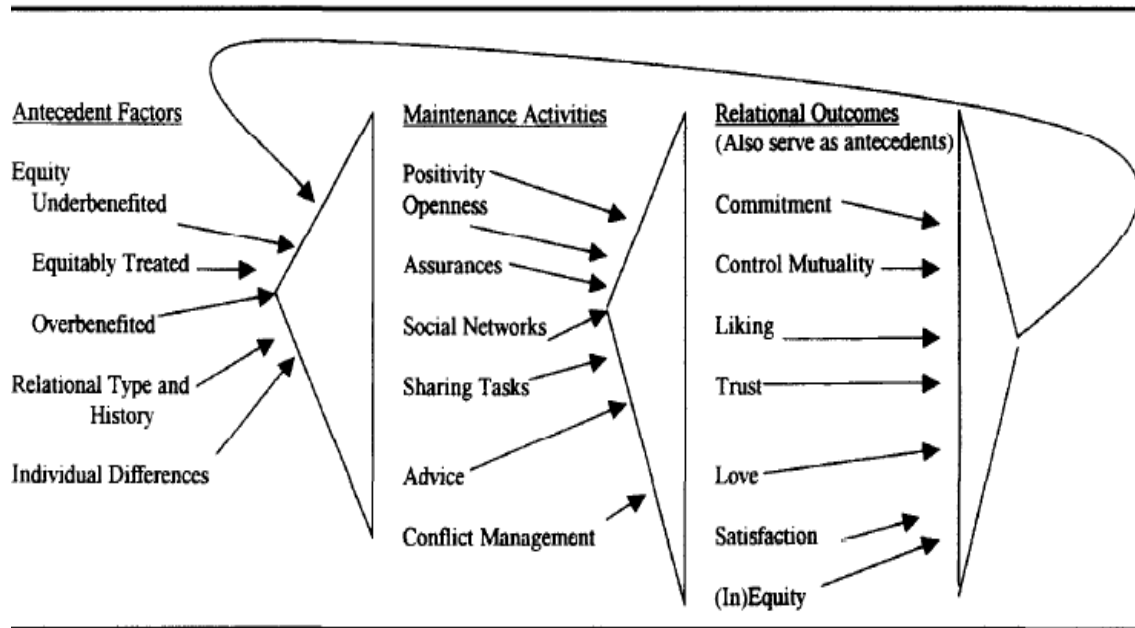


Figure 2.1: *Relational Maintenance model* (Canary & Dainton, 2003, p.70)

Taking this existential role of relationships, different scholars across disciplines have been extremely concerned about how to nurture relationships across the lifespan. Relationships may fall into different categories based on the characteristics of their members (e.g., closeness). Relationship maintenance encompasses a variety of interpersonal and sometimes even interspecies relationships, including friendships, families, and workplace relationships (Ogolsky & Monk, 2019). In the realm of the scope of this study, interpersonal and intergroup relations will be discussed with their respective details in the subsequent sub-sections.

2.1.1. Interpersonal Relationships

As social and communicative beings we come across various forms of interpersonal relationships daily with family members, friends, love partners, and colleagues. The association, connection, or friendship between or among people who have some common interest can be described as interpersonal relationships. In the academic setting, friendship among college students, which is one form of interpersonal relationship, could be described as the interactions and relationships between two or more people, especially those that are socially and emotionally meaningful (VandenBos, 2007). These interpersonal relationships could vary based on their intimacy or closeness, and can further be classified as kinship or familial, friendship, romantic, collegial, and so on.

As stated earlier, healthy relationships are essential in human life; and maintaining them warrants due attention. Just like any other key factors in life, relationships are also bound to formation, development, and termination. Given their significance, it is necessary to consider the crucial factors that facilitate the nurturing of relationships. From its formation to its ending, members of the relationship should engage in behaviours that flourish the relationship. Studies call this procedure “relationship maintenance” (Oswald, Clark & Kelly, 2004, p. 414).

Relational maintenance, in general terms, is anything that the members contribute to the development of the relationship from the time it is set up to the time it ends up. Technically, however, for relationships to be maintained, members should engage in some specific behaviours including preserving the relationships in existence, holding them at a specific state or condition, keeping them in satisfactory condition, and repairing them (Dindia & Canary, 1993). Given that these standards are fulfilled, the relationship maintenance is transformed to a rewarding and committed level.

With the conviction that the trends in the past had been overly concerned with romantic relationships maintenance while discounting friendship maintenance, researchers who were interested in the study of friendship maintenance investigated the factors that facilitate the quality of friendship and identified such behaviours as positivity, openness, supportiveness, and interaction (Oswald, Clark & Kelly, 2004). Notwithstanding the essential role the above factors have in determining friendship maintenance, such factors are not limited to these ones albeit. Others have explored related behaviours such as self-disclosure, spending quality time with each other, giving support, providing assurance, and maintaining levels of rewards (Fehr, 1996). All the same, understanding the mechanism that effectively sustains relationships would have paramount significance, and comprehending the topic from different angles might help to reach a better understanding.

On the contrary, if not managed properly, interpersonal relationships could shift toward conflict and disputes. In the absence of the previously mentioned friendship maintenance behaviours such as openness, positivity, supportiveness, and interaction, inevitably it would pave the way for interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal conflicts, which can be defined as “any overt and verbalized arguments or differences of opinion over any issue that could lead to a fight between students and between students and university leaders” commonly occur when there are “value and/or personality differences arising

from disagreements between individuals” (Bazezew & Neka, 2017, p. 28). Thence, effective communication is recommended as one of the effective ways or mechanisms that provide a foundation for preventing and resolving interpersonal communication (Bazezew & Neka, 2017).

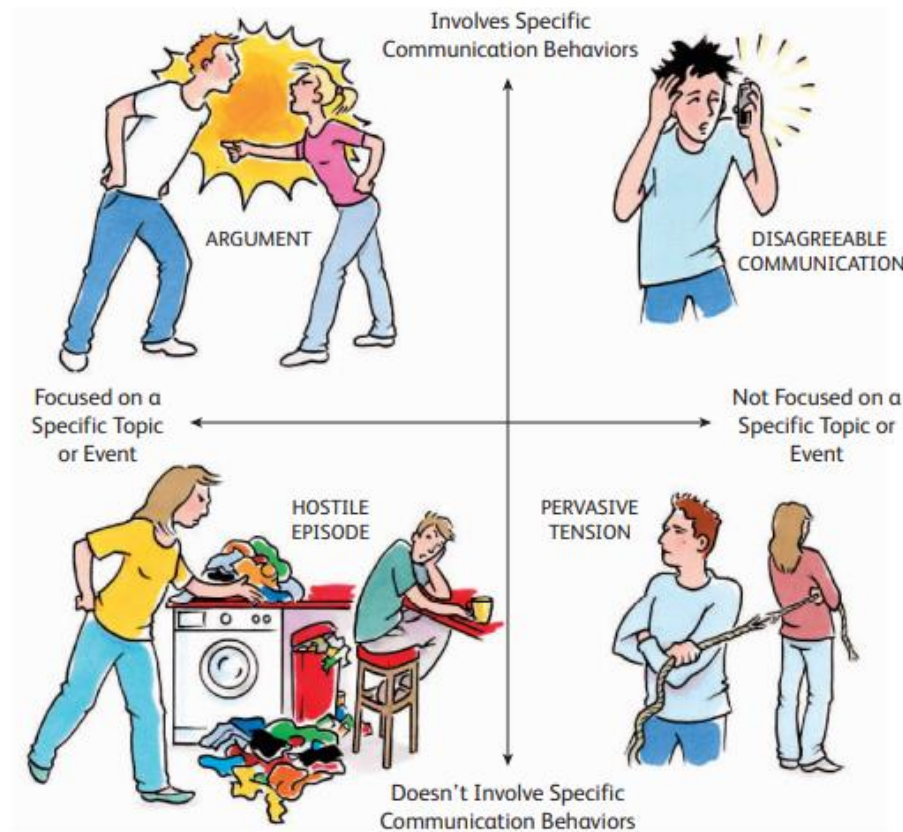


Figure 2.2. *Forms of Interpersonal Conflict* (Solomon & Theiss, 2012 p.349)

Though several theories have been developed with the intention of illustrating interpersonal relationship maintenance, the social exchange theory, particularly the interdependence theory is the most appropriate theoretical perspective on maintaining relationships (Dindia & Canary, 1993). According to the interdependence theory, people engage and stay in a relationship willingly if they get attractive rewards from the relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 2017). The assumption is that individuals will not stay if they do not get the best-expected outcome from the relationships leaning towards one's self-regard. This interdependent theory assumption matches the two dimensions of relationship maintenance definition given above: maintaining satisfaction and sustaining the existence of a relationship. Thus, in this way, social exchange theory/interdependence theory could be applied to interpersonal relationship maintenance.

The other theory that is concerned with how relationships are entered into and maintained is the uncertainty reductions theory (URT). The assumption here is that people try to reduce the uncertainty about each other when they learn about each other and engage more. The theory specifically dictates how people think and behave, especially during the initial stages of meeting a stranger. The URT shine out not only because it is an interpersonal communication theory but also because it is one of the rare theories that was successful in informing interlocutors' initial interaction, individual differences in uncertainty, and their interaction in the contexts of mediated communication as well as cross-cultural backgrounds. Although it was developed almost half a century ago by Berger & Calabrese (1975), the URT theory is still remarkably successful in guiding works on interpersonal interaction and relationships establishment; "URT was ground-breaking at its inception and is still ground-breaking today" (Knobloch, 2015, p.1). For successful intercultural communication, a reduction in anxiety/uncertainty must occur (Gudykunst, 2004). Thus, given the suitability and positive linkage of its tenets (willingness of learning about others and curiosity to reduce uncertainty) with friendship maintenance behaviours (openness, supportiveness, interaction, and positivity), one can conclude that it is feasible to apply URT in interpersonal relationship studies.

2.1.2. Intergroup Relationships

People naturally belong to different social groups which are characterized by diversified social identities such as gender, religion, ethnicity, language, profession, etc. and intergroup relations are the interactions between individuals who are identified by such social groups (Tajfel, 1982). Though there is difference of stand among the scholars on the definition of intergroup owing to the problematic nature of "group" itself, the classic and widely accepted definition of intergroup relation is given by Sherif (1962) as posited below:

Intergroup relations refer to relations between two or more groups and their respective members. Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group identifications we have an instance of intergroup behavior. (p. 5)

These social identities and the perception that the individual members of the group (known as ingroups) hold about themselves and about other members who do not belong to their group (known as outgroups) determine the intergroup relationships. Individuals' designation of themselves as in-group and others as an outgroup, per se, may not have a

problem as it is a natural process and is inevitable. The problem is when people perceive themselves and the group they categorize themselves with as superior and the outgroup as inferior, holding negative perceptions such as prejudice and anxiety, which slowly may turn into behaviours such as conflicts and discrimination (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Akbaş, 2010).

According to social identity theory, one of the most widely applied theories in intergroup relations, people who identify themselves with a certain social group have highly motivated self-esteem toward that social group. People with such social categorization generally have the tendency to see the outgroups negatively, merely because they belong to a group other than theirs; and view the in-groups positively because they share common identities (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Such kind of bigoted intergroup evaluation, in which individuals favour their own groups and treat unfairly the other group may trigger intergroup biases such as ethnocentrism, prejudice, and discrimination, ultimately leading to conflicts (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Empirical evidence revealed that university students have been vulnerable to a serious intergroup conflict mostly caused by prejudicial perceptions based on their social identity (Gonzalez & Kokozos, 2019). Stressing how serious the impact of intergroup behaviour might become, Hogg (2006) writes:

Intergroup relations are not just about perceptions, attitudes and explanations. They are very much about how one group behaves towards another group. The main behavioral feature of intergroup relations is discrimination, which can range from relatively innocuous ingroup favoritism, through name-calling and verbal abuse, to systematic intergroup violence and genocide. (p.546)

The other most influential and widely accepted theory in understanding the role of intergroup contact in intergroup relations was Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis. The assumption of this theory is that positive intergroup contact decreases negative intergroup perceptions and behaviours (e.g., anxiety, prejudice, ethnocentrism, discrimination, etc.) and facilitates positive attitudes (Akbaş, 2010). Consistent with this theory, experimental studies on the effect of intergroup contact on intergroup relationships found a meaningful association between pleasant contact and prejudice reduction ensuring the effectiveness of contact in improving intergroup attitudes if the right conditions are fulfilled (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Put differently, the mere presence of contact

would not be enough for the maintenance of positive intergroup relations. This may point to a serious concern that necessitates assisting the contact with an additional course of action, probably what (Islam & Hewstone, 1993) call qualitative (how often we engage in conversations with outgroup members) and quantitative (to what extent we experience the contact with the outgroups) aspects of intergroup contact in order to complete the facilitative role of contact in relationship maintenance.

Building on the work of Allport and other researchers who have studied intergroup contact, Segawa (2019) put up a framework (see figure 2.3) to explain how intergroup contact and ethnic interaction reduce inter-group prejudice, improve intergroup relations, and promote national integration. Studies also indicate that intergroup conflicts are often created by small intolerances and misunderstandings among the members of the outgroup (Abera, 2010), and in such cases, positive intergroup communication would have profound relevance in preventing and resolving the conflict. The notion of the contact hypothesis's meaningful intergroup seemingly overlaps with the literature, both accenting the importance of positive interaction in fostering intergroup relationships.

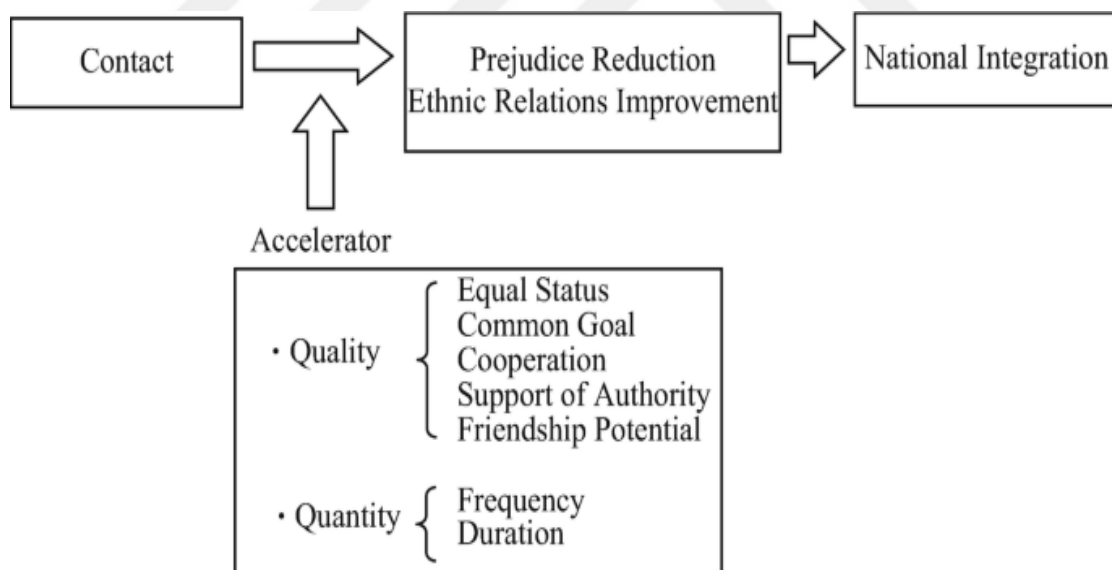


Figure 2.3: *Intergroup Contact Theory (Segawa, 2019, P.29)*

Furthermore, among the theories underpinning intergroup relations is the social dominance theory (SDT) which was developed by Sidanius and Pratto (1999). With a slight difference from the previous theories, the study of the creation and persistence of hierarchical social connections is central to social dominance theory. It explains the extent to which the socially constructed hierarchy and stereotypes are accepted or rejected by

people. Those individuals with high social dominance orientation are likely to desire to take control of the disadvantaged group opposing the ideas of equality, yet, unfortunately, such sort of people whether they are from the advantaged or disadvantaged groups, are more susceptible to greater determination and prejudice those with low social dominance orientation. Thus, such negative and anti-social qualities as racism, ethnocentrism, apathy, and conservativeness are associated with people with high social dominance orientation (SDO) (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993; Hogg, 2006). Probably, such people are those who stand against new changes and social policies that promote justice and equality in a diversified society by spreading social media hate speeches and being politically motivated derogations, in real-life situations. In the Ethiopian context, the factors impeding intergroup relationships such as ethnic identities and divisions, resource depletion and competition for power (Adamu, 2013) might aggravate the intergroup tensions by inhibiting the positive contact between the outgroups.

2.2. Interpersonal and Intergroup Relations in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is described as a nation of diverse ethnolinguistic groups. Hosting over 80 indigenous nationalities and a population of 115 million, it is the second most crowded country in Africa, next to Nigeria (O'Neill, 2020). The Ethiopian demographic structure or make-up was based on ethnic and religious federalism which facilitates segregation and division based on language and race as well as neighbourhood. Following the formation of the state in the late nineteenth century, the expansion of power led to the domination of religious, linguistic, and cultural identities of most Ethiopian nations, nationalities, and peoples by the then imperial powers. Explaining the historical configuration of Ethiopia and the inter-ethnic make-up of the society and its implication for intergroup relationships, Adamu (2013) writes the following:

For the majority part of the modern history of the country, the Amhara was the dominant ethnic group ... the Amharic language and the Amhara cultural values dominated the diverse ethnic groups of southern Ethiopia. The ethnic groups incorporated into the empire were believed to be treated as subjects, and predominantly, their culture, language, and identity were suppressed (p. 79).

In the current Ethiopian context, particularly, in emotion-oriented institutions such as higher education institutions, the communication trend seems challenging, contributing to interpersonal conflict and unhealthy interpersonal relationships (Elemo, 2019).

Political opportunism and the exploitation of ethnic and cultural differences are assumed as factors triggering such conflicts (Richards & Bekele, 2011). In such a setting where the public sphere is dominated by an energetic young population, the communication is predominantly hostile, destructive rather than constructive, demoralizing, and ineffective. The conflicts among different groups of people shoot up because of the spread of discriminatory discourses in various public spheres in Ethiopia. Local studies found out the causes of interpersonal conflicts are deep-rooted in communication problems & discriminatory discourses, including usage of negative language (such as shouting, insulting one another, & exchange of negative words), intimidation, violation of the agreement, and lack of empathic listening (Feven, 2013; Esayas, 2015; Yewubneh, 2016; & Roelandts, 2016). Ethnic differences, political motives, religious diversity, sexual abuse, and disrespect were the other primary sources of conflict. “Religious and some ethnic songs such as Tigrigna in the dormitory were the main source of conflict and quarrel on all campuses” (Bazezewu & Neka, 2017, p. 31).

On top of that, evidence shows that there is a critical prevalence of interactive intergroup tensions and conflicts in Ethiopia, particularly in the higher education institutions in Ethiopia. These conflicts are mainly caused by ethnicity, religion, and political related problems. The other triggering factors responsible for the inception of these challenges include past trauma, unsubstantiated paranoia, polarized partisanship, communication barrier, and conscious ethnic bias (Melkamu and Ameyu, 2013; Missaye, 2013; Adamu, 2013). On top of that, further triggering factors such as politically motivated ethnic and religious-based social media hate speeches, graffiti vandals, and biased historical narratives coupled with media manipulation are putting their relationships at the risk of deterioration. (Belay, 2019; Abera, 2018; Ebenezer, 2018; Chekol, Moges, & Nigatu, 2021). Studies conducted in different Ethiopian public universities revealed that the problems are growing further, warning their expansion to the societal/national level unless addressed instantly (Adamu, 2013; Teshome, 2018). Although these problems occur frequently, they have not received due attention because there was an assumption that studying or treating such topics/issues may have unpleasant consequences (Ashebir, 2015) and thus warrant proper and timely interventions.

2.3. The Importance of Communication in Relationships

Communication is vital to truly connecting with other people. The role of communication in relationships is well described by Gaskins (2019) and likened to oxygen in this way: “Communication to a relationship is like oxygen to life” (p. 99). Without effective communication, it is not only difficult to have healthy relationships but is impossible. All it takes bring long-established interpersonal relationships to an end is to say something negative or show disgusting nonverbal cues. When we feel that we are happy and comfortable with our relationships, it means that we have positive communication. Explaining the solid marriage between effective communication and relationships Heitler (2010) writes: “When people say, ‘We have a great relationship,’ what they often mean is how they feel when they talk with one another. They mean, ‘I feel positive toward that person when we interact. I send and I receive positive vibes with them.’” (para.1). Even though it is natural to have ups and downs in relationships, positive communication has the potential to maintain them. This indicates that both the challenges and disputes we confront in our interpersonal relationships and their remedies are interconnected with communication. Said another way, while people with effective communication have good relationships, people with poor communication have a deteriorating relationship.

Most of the time, conflicts in interpersonal relationships are occurred due to misunderstandings and poor communication as most relationship issues are related to communication problems. The major relationship issues are related with communication problems. Conflicts between individuals and groups are more likely to happen when outgroup members regularly interact with one another (intergroup communication). Once interviewed about why people fail to form and maintain close relationships, Martin L. King (1958) mentioned three main factors which are mutually inclusive and correlated at the same time. According to his explanation, the first reason why people do not come together is fearing each other which is instigated by not properly knowing each other; and the reason for not knowing each other comes from poor or lack of effective communication. So, it can be understood from this explanation that communication is the key factor for human connection and acquaintance. Socha & Pitts (2013), on the other hand, postulate that positive communication has the merit of creating relational health and wellness. Thus, communication is the foundation for every relationship, be it interpersonal, intergroup, or organizational.

In their two-path model of intra- and intergroup communication, Keblusek et al. (2018) link interpersonal and media communication with intergroup communication, recognizing that various communicative domains, like our interpersonal interactions and media preferences, influence and are influenced by our intergroup communication behaviour.

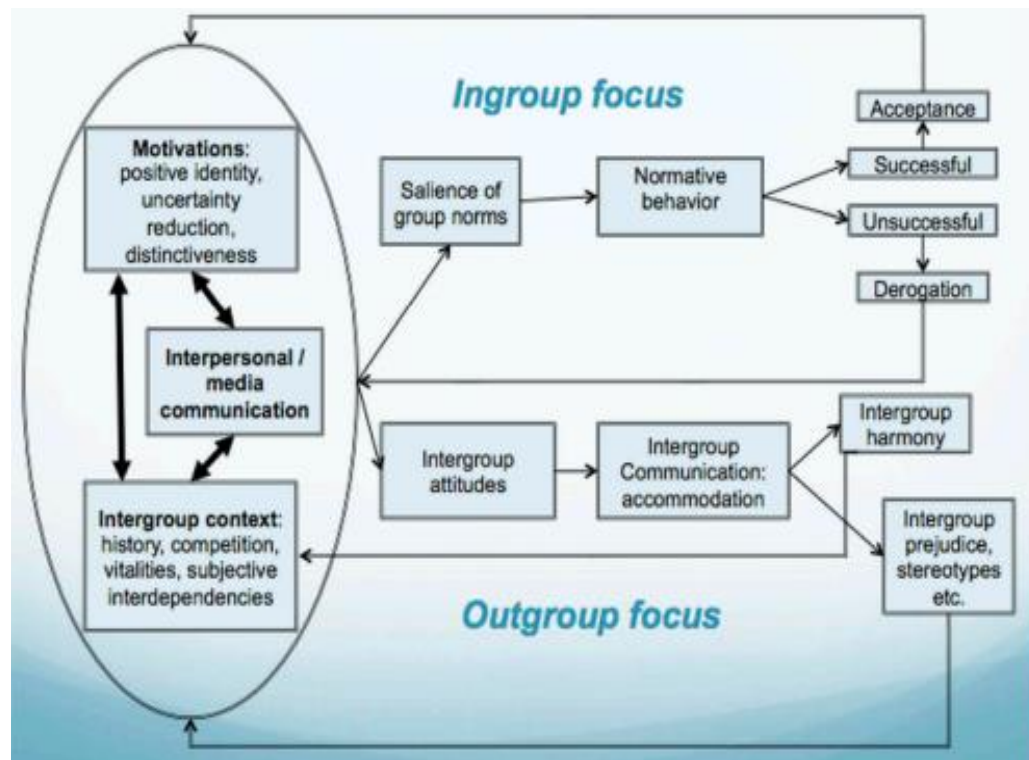


Figure 2.4. A two-path model of intra- and intergroup communication (Keblusek et al, 2018, p.80).

In addition to recognizing the very important role communication plays in relationships, it is important to ask what characteristics constitute effective communication in order to make the most of it. For a fairly long time, communication scholars were primarily concerned with the problematic nature of communication or the dark side of communication, disregarding the positive perspective, as explained by Meluch (2015):

Within the communication discipline, scholars often comment on the ability of communication to solve problems and bring people closer together. However, theoretical explanations of how communication can be a positive force in our lives sometimes fall short of making connections to practice in the everyday. (p. 161)

Cognizant of this, the latest scholarship in the field of interpersonal communication contends that positive communication genuinely responds to this question by

accentuating the positive perspective (Socha & Beck, 2015). So, it is necessary to examine what is positive communication as an independent discipline, what are its constituent features, how it evolved, and how it is enacted in our daily life circumstances, in order to properly utilize it for renovating interpersonal and intergroup relations.

2.4. Positive Communication: Concepts and Definitions

Scholars of interpersonal communication have long stressed on the negative aspects of communication., examining challenges and problems people face in their interpersonal relationships, and the role communication has in resolving those problems (Socha, 2009). They were overly preoccupied with the dark side of interpersonal communication while ignoring the bright and positive aspects of communication, which may have contributed to a disparity in communication research. While positive scholars do not avoid communication's negative aspects, they see an obvious gap in the positive side. Underlining this gap, Pitts & Socha (2013) postulate:

Communication scholarship has underestimated the importance of positive communication in daily routines that lead to healthy living and healthy living environments. Instead of focusing on communication in enhancing well-being across contexts and generating healthy interpersonal relationships, there has been a focus on maintaining status quo in relationships, managing communication across diverse encounters, or achieving effective and competent communication. (p.3)

Taking this into account, positive communication scholars have demanded a paradigm shift in the field of interpersonal communication towards the positive side (Ahmed, 2020), envisioning a promising future given that studies shift their focus from concentrating on the role of communication in solving problems to the role of creating conditions that can prevent the problems (Socha, 2009, p. 319).

As an independent field of study, Positive Communication is an emerging discipline, with its theoretical underpinnings still under development (Socha & Pitts, 2012). The new field is not yet well-established. Owing to the inadequate literature in the field of positive interpersonal communication, there was a clarion call from the founding scholars of the field toward researchers from different disciplines to mount a theoretical framework and contribute to the continued advancement of positive interpersonal communication research. Following this call, modestly growing research work has been added to the existing scant literature accentuating the “positive” perspective.

While positive communication has only recently been taken up as a study subject, there have been several studies in the past literature from different disciplines that have looked at various "positive" topics, and these studies have been classified as part of positive communication (Socha & Beck, 2015). The goal of the scholars was, thus, to link up and connect the dots and get the picture completed by establishing a new and independent branch of communication, that is Positive Communication. Additionally, other related works which have not been yet conceptualized under this new branch of communication have been evolving (Socha & Beck, 2015) as posited below:

In addition, although not yet labeled or indexed as "positive communication" per se, numerous studies have been published in the communication field's journals that explore a wide variety of topics that can justifiably be regarded as "positive communication," such as "peak communication," "genuine dialogue," "supportive listening," "prosocial communication," and more. (p.174)

This "positive" perspective is embodied by various behaviours or speech acts that encourage positive functioning. Some of these are genuineness, empathy, self-disclosure, respect, personal growth and high-impact communication (Cissna, 1975), initiating greetings, asking open-ended questions, choosing kind words (Mirivel, 2012), encouraging, disclosing, and listening (Mirivel, 2014). Some other forms of positive communication also include "prosocial communication, ethical communication, spiritual communication (Socha, 2019), peak communication (Gordon, 1985; Socha, 2019; Mirivel, 2019), nonviolent or affectionate communication (Rosenberg, 2003), constructive or facilitative communication (Cissna, 1975), mindful communication (Chapman, 2012), genuine dialogue, self-disclosure, supportive listening, genuine listening (Bodie, 2012), savoring (Pitts, 2019), communication excellence (Mirivel, 2012), forgiveness (Waldron & Kelley, 2008), etc.

The evolution of positive communication has a lot to do with the emergence and expansion of positive psychology. Positive communication is born from a growing body of research rooted in positive psychology and communication studies. Convinced by the assertion that the dark side is overconcerned, and inspired by positive psychology, a new branch of psychology that accentuates studying the strengths and virtues during human interaction, positive communication calls for urgency to study communication with a positive approach in the realms of happiness and social change (Muñiz-Velázquez & Pulido 2019). As a father of positive psychology, Seligman (along with the other

pioneers) has shifted the paradigm from accentuating the negative side of human behavior to balancing the emphasis on both sides with more emphasis on the positive perspective (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). Socha, one of the founding scholars in the field, contends that the two fields have much more in common; both realize the value of focusing on the strength and the “positive” perspective rather than the problems (Socha & Beck, 2015), facilitating relational communication that promotes happiness. Thus, positive communication includes most of the concepts connected with positive psychology. The common topics given focus in the new perspective include but are not limited to gratitude, compassion, empathy, generosity, forgiveness, encouragement, social support, appreciation, playfulness, affection, and virtue (Socha & Pitts, 2012; Socha & Beck, 2015).

Attempting to define positive communication, scholars have tried to describe positive communication from different perspectives. Even if the way they describe it differs, the descriptions revolve around common focal points. They generally point to the human interactions that trace a positive impact on social relationships. While trying to improve humans’ well-being and happiness, positive communication ensures the improvement of human lives on the other, according to these scholars. For Mirivel (2014, p. 7) positive communication is “any verbal or non-verbal behavior that functions positively in the course of human interaction”. Similarly, communication that is creative, efficient, ethical, intelligible, and artistic is also recognized as positive communication (Socha, 2012; Socha & Beck 2015; Muñiz-Velázquez & Pulido 2019).

Scholars also viewed positive communication from the point of view of human need-satisfaction. Depending on how it functions, Socha & Beck (2015) characterize positive interpersonal communication as positive interpersonal messages that function as a means of needs-satisfaction; regarding the messages that facilitate human needs-satisfaction as positive and the one that obstructs the “darkside” (Socha, 2019, p.34). Positive communication is also known as “peak communication,” which refers to times when people are at their happiest and most enjoyable interactions (Volk, 1995; Socha, 2019; Socha et al., 2016; Mirivel, 2019).

Apart from these, other important characteristics were taken into account when defining positive communication. In the words of Wilson & Munz (2019) positive communication is “message processes that promote hedonic and eudaimonic happiness” as well as those that facilitate “individual, relational, and [collective] health and

wellness”. Socha and Pitts’ (2012, p.12) definition of positive interpersonal communication is “message processes that display prosocial, ethical, spiritual/religious, and positive character qualities somehow perceived to help and benefit a relationship and/or relational participants, in general, promote eudemonic happiness.” Nevertheless, it is remarkably noted that a mere absence of negative verbal and nonverbal communication does not make a positive communication, rather there should be “positive, enhancing, and facilitative talks and gestures”, that contribute to the positive relationships. Finally, Positive communication is defined by White (2019) as “the systematic application of Values-in-Action (VIA) classification system of character strengths within educational settings” (p.392).

2.4.1. The Model of Positive Communication

Mirivel's (2014) positive communication model is a heuristic framework that is widely regarded as one of the best contributions to the field of positive communication, as it is guided by both theoretical and practical expertise (Meluch, 2015; Socha & Beck, 2015; Muñiz-Velázquez & Pulido, 2019). The model emphasizes six key speech acts that characterize positive communication and their corresponding functions. While acknowledging that there could be other speech acts that may exemplify positive communication, Mirivel (2019, p. 52) classified the six behaviours and their functions as the following:

- Through *greeting*, we create contact
- Through *asking*, we discover the unknown
- Through *complimenting*, we affect people
- Through *disclosing*, we deepen relationships
- Through *encouraging*, we give social support
- Through *listening*, we transcend perceived differences



Figure 2.5. *Positive Communication Model (Mirivel, 2014)*

These communicative acts are comprehensively discussed in his ground-breaking book entitled “The Art of Positive Communication” in which he also introduced his model. Though the book was initially meant for textbook use, it has been widely used by researchers as a guiding reference given that it has been supplemented by both theoretical and pragmatic applications as well as practical tools that enable the practice of positive communication in various aspects of life (Meluch, 2015; Mirivel et al., 2022). The author explained each component of these behaviours combining them with examples and functions they characterize encouraging the practice and mastery of positive interpersonal communication in real-life contexts. Thus, Mirivel’s model gives students, researchers as well as practitioners the opportunity to understand and practice the new scholarship with an evidence-based approach and integrate them into the interpersonal communication research. These six characteristics of positive communication are illuminated in detail in the following section.

2.4.2. Elements of Positive Communication

2.4.2.1. Greeting

Greeting is framed as one of the essential behaviours in positive communication as it welcomes others into our lives and gives room for connection to occur and acknowledges their presence (Mirivel, 2014). If the verbal expressions and gestures we use in our greetings are gratifying, the conversation that follows afterward would be promising and shining. On contrary, if we open our greetings with frowning eye contact or offensive body language, the dialogue will be aborted shortly. Practiced properly in different contexts of life aspects such as education, medicine, workplace, and everyday human interaction, the positive greeting may affect people and their interpersonal interactions. For instance, ‘Positive Greetings at the Door’ is proven to be a high-yield practice with low effort to implement with the potential of maintaining relationships, increasing engagement, decreasing disruptive behaviours, and ultimately promoting academic engagement (Bowring & Toogood 2019; Cook et al, 2018; Allday & Pakurar, 2007).

Positive Greetings at the Door (PGD) is a positive intervention method that combines the classroom climate, precorrection, and positive reinforcement into a single strategy. Its ultimate objective is to build behavioral momentum for behavior that is intellectually engaged. The first step in the technique is having unique positive interactions with each student as they entered the classroom (e.g., greeting them by name, shaking hands). This is done in an effort to build social belonging and foster a happy learning environment. Teachers stand at the door and engage in positive verbal (e.g., greeting using the student’s name, statement expressing interest in the student, etc.) or nonverbal (e.g., handshake, fist bump, pat on the shoulder, head nod indicating approval, etc.) positive interactions (i.e., greetings) with each student as they enter the room (Cook et al., 2018).



Figure: 2.6. *Positive greetings at the door (CityNews, 2019)*

Likewise, underlining the importance of positive greetings, a study that examined the nature of emails received by employees, asserted that positive greetings supplemented by small positive messages added in the emails have contributed to the enrichment of a positive work environment (Waldvogel, 2001; Mirivel, 2021).

2.4.2.2. Asking

Asking is an essential communicative technique through which we gain information. In human interaction, we do use asking to unearth the untold stories about others and without it, communications fail as it is essential to successful communication. In this regard, asking open-ended questions, preceded by positive intention and empathy would let the interlocutors open up and share their concerns, thereby deepening the interpersonal relationships. Mirivel (2014) asserts that open-ended questions have the power to create opportunities to interact with others, open the encounters and discover more about one another. It was also demonstrated as paving the way for other important human interactions such as self-disclosure and thus it is at the heart of positive communication (Mirivel, 2019).

One of the most compelling instances where asking was shown to be of the utmost importance is the genuine story of Kevin Hine's escape from a suicide attempt. Kevin decided to take his own life since he was in despair, and no one had asked him how he

was doing. He felt worthless and as though nobody cared. In his account of his own experiences, Kevin claims that if someone had asked him, "Are you okay? Is something wrong?" or "Can I help you?" he would have told them everything and would not have attempted suicide. Unfortunately, no one asked, and he made suicide attempt though he was eventually saved (Hines, 2013, p.72).

2.4.2.3.Complimenting

Complimenting is "the communicative choice to affect others positively" (Mirivel, 2019, p.55). Positive communication scholars contend that communication is not a mere exchange of information, but also a means of affecting the people we are communicating with. Thus, complimenting can build up people and affect them positively as just a single message of gratitude can bring about an extraordinary change in human interaction. Studies show that positive feedback (using the BET model) has the potential to transform negative situations into positive ones and promote the overall performance of students and employees as well (Harms & Roebuck, 2010). The purpose of complimenting is to make others feel good and confident as well as to create a better social environment. Despite its ease of use, and its significant role in positively affecting people, enhancing interpersonal links, and promoting social bonds (Jones, 1964; Jones & Wortman, 1973), complimenting is an underestimated feature of positive communication (Boothby & Bohns, 2021).

People tend to be negative, so they criticize more than they compliment without realizing that criticism destroys relationships and that it costs a lot to make up for its effects. While it's enough to use a single negative word to break a relationship, at least 5 positive words are necessary to compensate what one negative word causes in relationship. The simple negative comments we point out, sometimes even without noticing, could go as far as sarcastic or disparaging remarks strong enough to ruin our relational acquaintances (Zenger & Folkman, 2013).

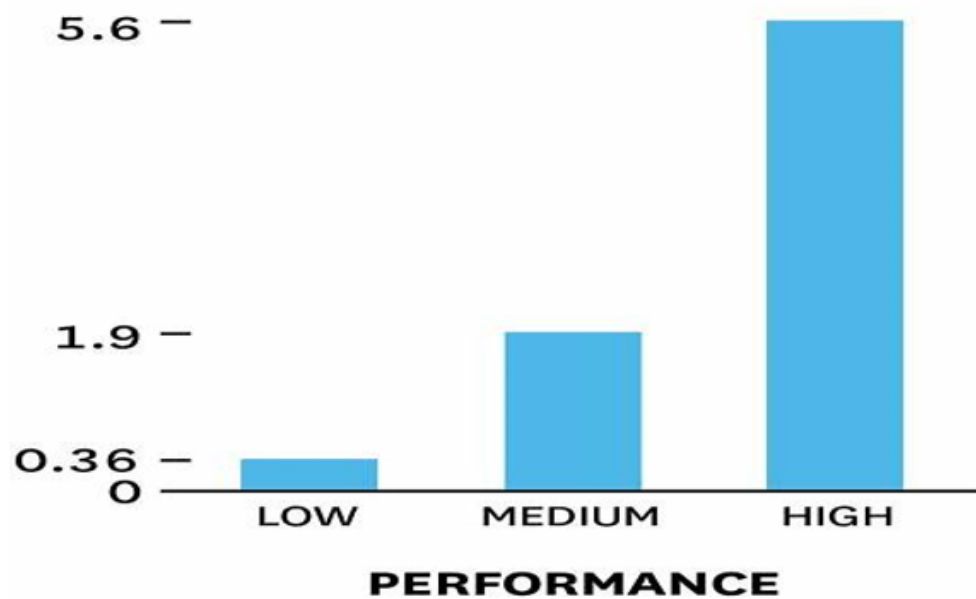


Figure 2.7: Compliment to criticism ratio (Zenger & Folkman, 2013).

2.4.2.4. Disclosing

Disclosing is another important yet complex positive communication comportment that deepens relationships by creating intimacy and bond among people. It determines how intimate people are, at what level their relationship is, and how long it could last. Different factors may influence self-disclosure, including personality, mood, loneliness, and anxiety/fear (Cherry, 2020; Frothingham, 2022). Depending on how we handle it, self-disclosure can be either positive or destructive, and thus needs to be deemed mindfully.

Miscommunication in intergroup encounters typically stems from a lack of knowledge about the outgroups; nevertheless, disclosure bridges this gap (Gudykunst, 2004). Empirical studies show that the urge to share knowledge is substantially greater in the context of computer-mediated communication than in face-to-face settings. Like in the offline settings, self-disclosure techniques are essential, especially in the early stages of relationship development. Participants in online situations likewise experience these needs and aspirations, but because computer-mediated communication (CMC) gives people more control over how they present themselves, they can strategically manage their online connections. However, though it offers independence and anonymity, self-disclosure risks in online interactions (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006).

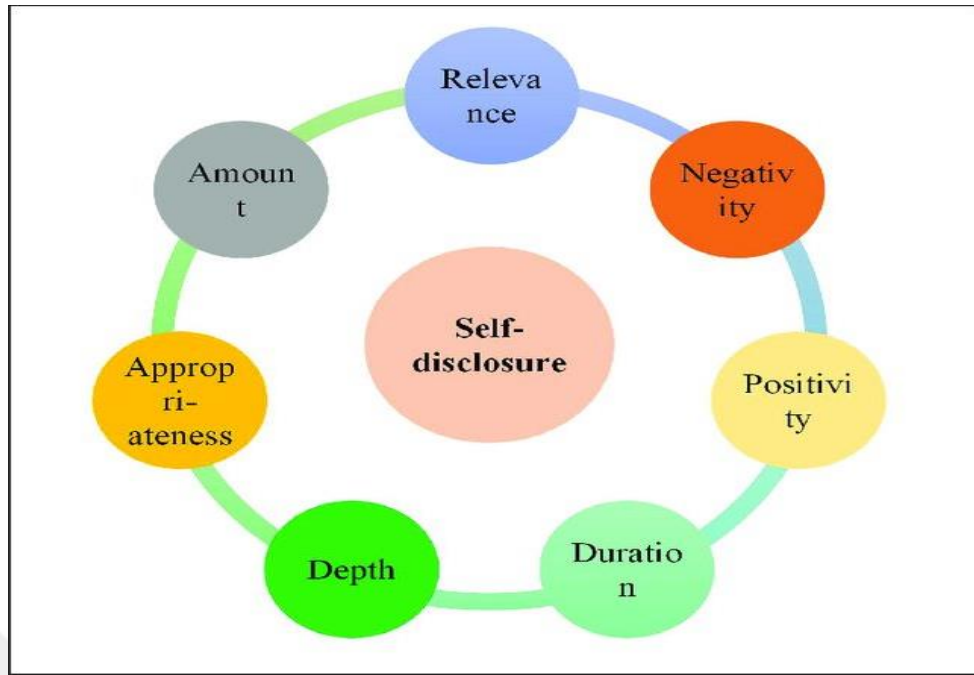


Figure 2.8: *Dimensions of self-disclosure (Qin, 2022, p.3)*

Every communicator has a unique story and wants to be heard and accepted by others; yet they fear telling others what they feel fearing helplessness. However, to get acceptance and recognition one needs to disclose themselves and this requires courage to share one's details with others may be at the expense of vulnerability, ultimately disclosing sets them free, creates a sense of honesty and trustworthiness as the decision to speak up and be vulnerable connects people more deeply (Powell, 1969).

2.4.2.5. Encouraging

The other technique used in positive communication is encouraging. Encouraging is a speech act that improves another person's sense of self and enables that person to keep growing in the face of adversity, obstacles, or challenges (Mirivel, 2014). The purpose of encouraging is to positively affect others. It gives people the opportunity to encourage one another by cheering the accomplishment and success their friends are reaching. This encouragement could be through words of mouth or facial expression or body language or in any other form may be by written letters or giving gifts. Various exercises can be utilized to realize this practice.

2.4.2.6. Listening

Contrary to what many of us presume, listening is one of the most important but hardest skills of communication worthy of exerting rigorous efforts to master including a

lot of empathy, a high level of openness, unconditional positive regard, and willingness to approach others (Mirivel, 2004). Unfortunately, it is the most underrated skill of communication. Affirming that active listening can shape our connections and improve relationships, Nichols & Straus (2021) assert that the otherwise is impeding our understanding and interaction, especially in the digital era in which we are overwhelmingly occupied with our screens. One possible underlying reason why listening is not touching relationships in the real-life situation could be because “most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply” (Covey, 2004, p. 239). Cognizant of that, positive communication scholars accentuate listening considering it the most important feature of interpersonal communication and formulated various practices which aspire to improve our understanding of others and strengthen relationships as well as transcend our perceived differences (Mirivel, 2021).

When we listen to others with empathy, we can transcend the perceived differences and separateness. Empathetic listening aims to enhance our understanding of other people and such activities have the potential to generate compassion, forgiveness, and such positive communication behaviours are directly related to and have the power to strengthen relationships (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). Listening is one of the most crucial but hardest things to do in human interaction because it takes a lot of empathy, a high level of openness, unconditional positive regard, and willingness to approach others (Mirivel, 2014). Deep listening is being present to another person, giving them your full attention while trying to have no judgment or evaluation. In short, it takes guts to put yourself in others' shoes and be open to viewing things from their perspective without passing judgment, giving them the benefit of being heard and acknowledged.

2.4.3. Positive Communication Practices/Techniques

Positive communication is an art or skill that can be learned, practiced, and mastered and there are various effective techniques that can ease the process of practicing positive communication. The purpose of these techniques is to create opportunities for the participants of the Positive Communication Intervention program in helping them develop positive communicative skills that are instrumental for thriving relationships. Even though there could be other numerous techniques that can be used to aid mastery of positive communication, the following are suggested to be fundamental ones in practicing

positive communication given that they were verified as evidence-based behavioral actions meant to increase personal as well as relational well-being (Socha & Beck, 2015; Carr et al., 2021). Thus, based on positive communication research, the core techniques identified for serving the aforementioned purposes include greeting, asking, complimenting, disclosing, encouraging, and listening (Mirivel, 2014). According to Mirivel (2021), practicing these speech acts can foster intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, both at home and the workplace as well as social bonds in general. Similarly, self-disclosure, empathy, respect, and genuineness enable the harnessing of strong intimacy as well as interpersonal relationships (Cissna, 1975).

2.4.3.1. Open-Ended Questions

When practicing asking as positive communication, open-ended questions are recommended because they provide the opportunity for sustaining conversations and allowing further discussions, without limiting or interrupting the thoughts of the people involved (Mirivel, 2021). The curiosity to ask and discover about others (especially in vulnerable situations) with positive intention and empathic understanding seeking to create connection signals positive communication. People are afraid to tell what they feel or who they are because they do not feel that we are genuine or empathetic when asking. But, when they realize strong willingness and authenticity in our interpersonal interaction, then they open up and share with us their untold stories, and thus, the two sides feel perfect and mutual empathy, the notion Powell (1969) describes as peak communication. That is how open-ended question functions. Explaining the function of asking in interpersonal relationships and how the open-ended questions foster positive relationships, Mirivel (2014) writes:

[...] our relationships with others are created by the way we interact with them. The way we ask questions of one another is thus fundamentally linked to what people co-create together. [...] questions will set in motion topics of conversations, influence the next person's talk, monitor the depth and personalness of a response, and enable the discovery of who a person really is and what they've experienced. Therefore, the questions that people ask in their personal relationships will naturally affect how people come to understand each other, how intimate they will be, and how much they will know about each other. If asking questions defines a relationship, then it is logical to assume that asking better questions will improve the quality of a relationship. (p.48)

2.4.3.2. Gratitude Visit Exercise

One of the best ways to practice complimenting is through a *gratitude visit exercise* - a heartfelt manner of expressing genuine thanks and appreciation to someone who has made a significant difference in one's life yet has never been properly thanked (Seligman, 2011). A gratitude visit is proved to be very effective in affecting people positively (both the receiver of the gratitude and the grateful person). In his book “Authentic Happiness”, Seligman (2002) recounts how practicing gratitude exercises was impactful and thrilling, especially from the practical experience of his students under his own supervision. Furthermore, it has been ascertained in the previous empirical studies that such practices of gratitude or complimenting are potent in pleasing the recipient of the praise and elevating the spirit of the grateful person (Wood et al., 2010; Heath & Heath, 2017). Evaluating the influence of the received compliment can also be taken as another exercise on this topic.

2.4.3.3. “I” – Statement

“I” – Statement is a form of assertive communication technique used to express disappointment or to express one’s feelings positively without offending the other person but at the same time without hiding or avoiding the feelings. Contrary to the “You” – statement which triggers defensiveness in the interlocutors, the “I”- statement is an acceptable expression both by the sender and receiver of the message (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010). “I” statements are simple methods of positive communication to express one’s feelings without being defensive, especially when one perceives that they are being blamed by others. Put another way, “I” statements are techniques to communicate what is upsetting while minimizing blaming with positive alternative language. Studies have shown that “I” statements reduce hostility and defensiveness as well as foster positive communication in interpersonal relationships when used correctly (Rogers, Howieson, & Neame, 2018). Thus, this technique gives people the opportunity to express feelings and disappointments in a positive way. It is a positive and polite manner of expressing disagreements without offending the speaker, to put it in another way.

For example, if you want to inform a friend that you do not like his conduct and want him to stop it, you can use the “I” -statement to describe your sentiments and how his behavior affects you. In this case, instead of yelling “You must stop!”, you can convey the same message with a better expression by focusing on your sentiments saying, “I felt

terrible for what you did, I would feel better if you did not do it”. The same message, with a different tone. While the person feels attacked and wants to be defensive with the first sentence, he would understand that you are expressing your feelings in the latter. This way, you would be contributing to the prevention of the possible incidence of interpersonal conflicts.

2.4.3.4. Johari Window Exercise

The Johari window model is a framework designed to inform about our interpersonal relationships and how to nurture them using disclosing techniques (Luft & Ingham, 1955). According to this model, there are 4 basic quadrants regarding the information about ourselves; and it is recommended to widen the *open self* quadrant and narrow the remaining others. The four quadrants are:

- information we know about ourselves, and others know too (*Open Self*)
- information only others know about us, and we do not know (*Blind Self*)
- information only we know about ourselves, and others do not know (*Hidden Self*)
- information that neither others nor we know about ourselves (*Unknown Self*)

	Known to Self	Not Known to Self
Known to Others	Open Self (You & others know)	Blind Self (Only others know)
Not Known to Others	Hidden Self (Only You know)	Unknown Self (No one knows)

Figure 2.9. *The Johari Window Model*

Sharing and exposing this information to people in our relationships (e.g., school friends, co-workers, romantic partners) using self-disclosure would enable us to open up and facilitates the deepening of relationships. It is obvious that people would get the opportunity to know about us and approach us only through the willingness and

information we share with them, and this would in turn strengthens the trust between us. Of course, the deep personal secrets that may expose us to risks should be evaluated before sharing. People offer their own information about us when they learn more about us, as evidenced by the classic saying "*There is no a better mirror than a best friend.*" In such a way, our relationships get bolstered and we would have quality contacts.

This process is mostly done through the following techniques. The assumption is to widen our understanding of each other by expanding the *open self* area (see fig. 2.9). This is done by importing the information from the *hidden self* (via self-disclosure) and *blind self* area (via positive feedback) to the *open self* area. This way, we get to know each other more deeply.

To do so, we practice the Johari window exercise using the adjectives (see table 2.1) developed for this purpose. First, we genuinely describe ourselves by selecting 5-6 adjectives that we believe define us from the list of the adjectives provided. We put the listed adjectives into the *hidden self* area . Then, we invite a few people we trust and understand from our relationships and let them choose 5-6 adjectives that they identify us with from the same list. We put their selected adjectives into the *blind self* area. The remaining list of adjectives would be imported to the *unknown self*. In the end, the overlapping adjectives (selected both by us and others) would be imported to the *open self* area, implying the degree of our openness to others and the level of our interpersonal relationships. The model advises expanding our open-self area as much as possible using the self-disclose technique to boost the chance of deepening our social interaction.

Table 2.1. Johari Adjective List/Worksheet

List of adjectives with possible descriptions of participants						
Able	Accepting	Adaptable	Bold	Brave	Calm	Caring
Cheerful	Clever	Complex	Confident	Dependable	Dignified	Energetic
Extroverted	Friendly	Giving	Happy	Helpful	Idealistic	Independent
Ingenious	Intelligent	Introverted	Kind	Knowledgeable	Logical	Loving
Mature	Modest	Nervous	Observant	Organized	Patient	Powerful
Proud	Quiet	Reflective	Relaxed	Religious	Responsive	Searching
Self-assertive	Self-conscious	Sensible	Sentimental	Shy	Silly	Smart
Spontaneous	Sympathetic	Tense	Trustworthy	Warm	Wise	Witty

2.4.3.5. Intergroup Dialogue

Intergroup dialogue is the next activity in practicing positive communication. Intergroup dialogue is a form of communication that aims to increase intergroup communication, understanding, and collaborative activities by raising critical self-awareness and social awareness. It is an ongoing sustained conversation designed to build relationships across differences. The critical element of the dialogic process involves active listening, empathy, and perspective-taking (Muller & Miles, 2017). As a constructive technique of positive communication, intercultural or intergroup dialogue greatly contributes to create the understanding between people of different cultures and peace-building process among individuals, institutions and even nations (Yang, 2019).

According to Jessop & Milofsky (2014) (experts from USIP's Academy), dialogue is "a dynamic process of joint inquiry and listening to diverse views, where the intention is to discover, learn and transform relationships in order to address practical and structural problems in a society." (para.7). Dialogue is not a passive process where people simply come together to exchange ideas and leave; it is an active and challenging process that

requires positive intention, expert facilitation, and a well-organized structure. The following table from United States Institute compares various crucial communication practices with the intention of enhancing the understanding of dialogue.

Table 2.2. Comparing Dialogue, Discussion, and Debate (Jessop & Milofsky, 2014)

 Dialogue	 Discussion	 Debate
Find common good	Present ideas or opinions	Succeed or win
Look for shared meaning	Seek answers and solutions	Affirm our point of view
Identify and examine areas of difference	Acknowledge areas difference	Focus on difference to gain advantage
Listen to understand and find meaning	Listen to hear other perspectives	Look for flaws in other arguments
Cultivate an open-minded attitude	Hold an accepting attitude	Keep a close-minded attitude
Suspend what we believe	Share what we believe	Invest in what we believe
Share feelings and experiences and validate those of others	Avoid feelings	Deny others' feelings and personal experiences
Build relationships	Maintain relationships	Disregard relationships

2.4.3.6. Active-Constructive Responding (ACR)

The other method/activity used to practice encouragement was *Active Constructive Responding (ACR)*. It is a positive way of responding when someone shares good experiences or information. It typically occurs when a person has the courage to communicate their needs and wants, and at the same time, consider the desires of others in a way that is neither passive nor aggressive.

ACR has been proved to have both personal benefits (such as increased positive emotions, subjective well-being, and self-esteem, and decreased loneliness) and relational benefits (satisfaction, intimacy, commitment, trust, liking, closeness, and stability), (Gable & Reis, 2010). Tocino-Smith (2019) beautifully articulate ACR as the following:

How positive we are when our significant other shares with us something they express with enthusiasm and feel strongly about, it turns out, not only speaks volumes about our attachment styles but also, have a long-term impact on the quality and longevity of our relationships. These micro instances are often and easily brushed off as insignificant. (para.1)

To practice this positive feedback, users are usually advised to listen carefully when people they care about (in close relationships) report good events to them and try to respond actively and constructively based on Gable's matrix of active-constructive responding. Though there are four styles of responding (Active and constructive, Passive and constructive, Active and destructive, Passive and destructive), it is not all of them play part in building positive relationships. According to Gable et. al. (2004), out of the four styles, only the active-constructive response is beneficial for a positive relationship and thus this feedback style should be accentuated and encouraged to nurture. The following table contains four types of responding to other people's good news, their peculiar features as well as the possible example one can use when interacting with people in close relationships. A husband's reaction/feedback to his wife's good news of a job promotion was taken as an example.

Table 2.3. Active constructive responding (Gable et al.,2004)

	Constructive	Destructive
Active	Responding enthusiastically; maintaining eye contact, smiling, displaying positive emotion <i>e.g., "That is wonderful! I am so happy for you. You would be excellent in your new position."</i>	Pointing out the downside; displaying negative nonverbal cues <i>e.g., "If you get the promotion, you are going to have to be at work all week and on Saturday mornings too."</i>
Passive	Happy, but lacking enthusiasm/downplaying; little to no active emotional expression <i>e.g., "That's nice that you are being considered for the promotion."</i>	Lacking interest; displaying little to no eye contact, turning away, leaving the room <i>e.g., "A promotion, Huh? Well, hurry up and get changed so we can get some dinner. I'm starving."</i>

2.4.3.7. Empathy

As a positive communication technique, empathy would let the interlocutors open up and share their concerns, thereby deepening the interpersonal relationships. Studies suggest that using empathy can boost relationships between individuals at the interpersonal level and can lessen the perceived differences between the members of outgroups (Gonzalez et al., 2015). Empathy would let individuals deeply listen to

another person, giving them their full attention while trying to have no judgment or evaluation.

2.4.3.8. Perspective-taking

Related to empathy, perspective-taking is also about putting oneself into the shoes of others by considering the point of others without any judgment, providing them the value of being listened to and recognized. It was verified in the prior studies that this technique not only helps to improve the relationships between members of outgroup members but also reduces prejudices and discriminatory behaviours (Gehlbach, 2004; Shih et al., 2009).

In his landmarking book “*The 7 habits of highly Effective People*”, Steven R. Covey (2004) used an interesting example to show how powerful perspective-taking is in paradigm shift (the way we see the world). He presents how a small number of encounters and exposures with the famous *Young Woman or Old Woman* optical illusion image completely changed the way individuals used to view and experience the world. In the end, taking this experience in which, a 10-second exposure changed people’s perspectives as a practical example, Covey asks rhetorically and astonishingly (calling the attention of his readers) how our experience would be when we are exposed to different prejudicial and stereotypic acts, hate speeches, and corrupted manipulations of the media for decades.

2.4.3.9. Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR)

Unconditional Positive Regard is defined as the notion that entails full acceptance and support for people without evaluating or judging them for who they are or what they say (Bozarth, 2013). Expanded by Rogers (1957), UPR is a technique frequently used in interpersonal relations and is proven to have startling benefits in improving intimacy and human interaction. This technique gives participants the opportunity to approach others with openness and curiosity allowing them to develop healthy relationships. UPR is not an easy task to practice, because when you listen to people with unconditional positive regard, first you avoid the precondition (e.g., talk to people if they support our idea, or if they are from our group) and the negative thoughts and actions (e.g., avoiding usage of negative language or disgusting body language) and approach them with good intention irrespective of their appearance, skills, or possessions. Though difficult to practice, it has a long-lasting and profound impact on interpersonal relationships.

2.4.3.10. Forgiveness

Empirical evidence indicates that forgiveness is one of the best tactics for restoring crumbling relationships and preserving positive interpersonal interactions (Kelley, 1998; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). It is a communicative process that enables the maintenance of interpersonal relationships and sets free from negative psychological thoughts (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). In their book “*Communicating Forgiveness*”, Waldron & Kelley (2008) asserted that forgiveness was ignored in communication research, they pointed to the power of forgiveness in interpersonal relationships and urged its practice for the cultivation of relationships. Arguing that forgiveness has mental, physical as well as relational benefits, they also mentioned 5 benefits that forgiveness has, as stated below. Thus, according to Waldron & Kelley (2008, p. 130-131), forgiveness:

- Repairs broken relationships
- Restores personal well-being
- Expresses love and commitment
- Recognizes conciliatory behavior
- Restores relational justice

2.4.3.11. The Three Blessings (What-Went-Well) Exercise

This technique is mostly used as a positive intervention to arouse the emotional well-being of individuals within stressful conditions and increase their optimism and positive thinking skills. People mostly focus on the negative aspect of their daily activities, encounters, and their social interactions. As a result of such manners, they are confronted with negative psychological feelings including depression, anxiety, and loss of interest (low performance). Thinking to resolve these problems with possible simple and practical remedies or techniques, positive psychology scholars developed the three blessings or what-went-well exercise. This simple exercise of focusing on simple positive things that happened in our day (be it at work, social interaction, or study) would change our perspective, boost satisfaction, and bolster our happiness. This activity, according to Seligman, has been shown to have a positive long-term influence on growing optimism, developing appreciation, boosting happiness, and improving behavior toward others (Seligman, et al., 2005; Seligman, 2011).

2.4.3.12. Games

Games are one of the most effective techniques for adorning interpersonal or intergroup interactions as they are a set of well fun-design activities. Naturally, human beings like fun and play. Games have the tendency to create a sense of humor and make people laugh and smile thereby creating positive emotions. There are different sorts of communication games such as conflict resolution games, jokes, storytelling, and so on. These games are so helpful in that they bring people together by building trust, encourage listening without judging, create a culture of respect and collaboration, improve communication, as well as, resolving conflicts. Above all, the most exciting aspect of communication games is that they give the opportunity to the participants to learn new things and develop new skills while enjoying their interactions (Scannell, 2010).

2.4.3.13. Storytelling

Storytelling is an activity that is both social and cultural. Every society has its own system of narratives passed down from generation to generation for entertainment, education, cultural preservation, or teaching moral values. In this activity, the participants talk about controversies they have experienced in real life. They are encouraged to describe how they handled a previous conflict, no matter the outcome. The goal of the storytelling approaches is to demonstrate that we are all prone to make mistakes or act impulsively at times. It also demonstrates how to wisely handle intergroup conflicts in our everyday social interactions. Participants would tell their stories, and the group would evaluate, critique, and provide solutions before deciding on the best solution. The researcher would facilitate and guide the practice of narration while avoiding the most sensitive and private incidents and current brawls. Stories make it easier for students to recall events, recover from negative emotions, and engage in meaningful interactions by facilitating positive interventions (Tomasulo & Pawelski, 2012).

2.5. Effectiveness of Positive Communication in Enhancing Relationships

People are aware of the vital role communication plays in relationships. But they often take that for granted and only a few examine the covert behind the process of interpersonal and relational communication. The impact that communication has in bolstering interpersonal and intergroup relationships, the attributes of such effective communication, as well as its potency, are often less accentuated in communication research. These are some of the core foci in the new and emerging scholarship (i.e.,

Positive Communication) (Socha and Pitts, 2012). Even though it is inevitable to experience ups and downs in human interaction, using mindful and positive communication to address conflicts can make them simpler to deal with and develop a stronger and better relationship.

The findings of empirical studies have demonstrated that positive communication has paramount significance in building healthy relationships. As a new branch of communication science that accentuates the positive side of human behavior and communication, it ensures the appliance of healthy relationships (Arkadyevna, 2014), benefits relations by fostering eudaemonic wellbeing (Socha & Pitts, 2012), prevents and resolves conflicts in a friendly and informal way (Deep, Othman & Salleh, 2016) as well as foster positive social interactions, thus enhancing relationships (Gable et al., 2004).

Even though it is hard to find empirical studies that specifically examined the effects of positive communication on interpersonal or intergroup relationships so far, there are scattered topics studied that have links among these variables. “While such positive communication topics may have been explored in decades previous as disparate research agendas, an inclusive positive communication mosaic has emerged in published works and conference proceedings” (Muñiz-Velázquez & Pulido, 2019, p.72).

Embedded within this “positive” perspective are various communicative behaviours or speech acts that exemplify positive functions including genuineness, empathy, self-disclosure, respect, growth-promoting communication (Cissna, 1975, p. 22), initiating greetings, asking open-ended questions, choosing to say something nice (Mirivel, 2012), encouraging, disclosing, and listening (Mirivel, 2014). Some other forms of positive communication (topics studied so far in this range) also include “prosocial communication, ethical communication, spiritual/religious communication (Socha, 2019), peak communication (Gordon, 1985; Socha, 2019; Mirivel, 2019), nonviolent or affectionate/compassionate communication (Rosenberg, 2003), constructive communication, facilitative communication (Cissna, 1975), mindful communication (Chapman, 2012), genuine dialogue, self-disclosure, supportive listening, listening as positive communication (Bodie, 2012), savoring (Pitts, 2019), communication excellence (Mirivel, 2012), communicating forgiveness (Waldron & Kelley, 2008), etc.

The association between positive communication (and/or forms of positive communication distinctively) and relationships of various levels be it personal, interpersonal, or intergroup was documented in previous studies. For instance, some of

the empirical findings assert that positive communication can promote and facilitate relational health (Pitts & Socha, 2013), foster human relations, and “transform any ordinary moment of human interaction into an extraordinary one” (Mirivel, 2014; 2019:58), strengthen relationships (Beck & Socha, 2015; Frey & White, 2012) and contribute to positive and healthy relationships (Seligman, 2011). Likewise, the existing literature demonstrates a positive association between the restoration and nurturance of relationships and distinct forms of positive communication such as forgiveness (Kelly, 1998; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010), spiritual communication (Baesler, 2012), peak communication (Mirivel, 2019; Socha, 2019), intergroup dialogue (Alimo, 2012), empathy and self-disclosure (Cissna, 1975), gratitude (Wood, et al. 2010). It was also pointed out that the mass media, if seen in a positive light (positive media and Media literacy), has the power to both foster and sustain a positive culture and subjective well-being by spreading contagious positivity and lowering stress and negativity (Keener, 2012; Gielan, 2015).

On top of that, Mirivel (2014) studied what features of interpersonal communication are at the heart of human interaction and can deepen relationships and found six behaviours (greeting, asking, complimenting, disclosing, encouraging, and listening), which he later pigeonholed as behaviours of positive communication in his model of positive communication. Similarly, Wood et al., (2010) assert that people who regularly practice gratitude are satisfied with their relationships. In the literature, nonviolent/compassionate communication is also illustrated as an effective tool to build healthy interpersonal and intergroup relationships (Rosenberg, 2003; Jasz, 2019). There is also empirical evidence that different levels of positive communication such as empathy, respect, genuineness, and self-disclosure are associated with depth of intimacy and interpersonal relationships as stated in the words of Cissna (1975):

[...] communication of different levels of empathy, respect, genuineness, and self-disclosure are associated with different feelings of being accepted or rejected, and the communication of these different levels is also associated with different possibilities for personal growth and for the depth of intimacy in interpersonal relationships. (p.7)

Furthermore, prior studies revealed that positive intergroup contact, as an essential form of the communicative process, depicted improvement in intergroup relations (Adamu, 2013; Christ, et al. 2014), facilitated intergroup interactions, and led to prejudice and anxiety reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Harwood, 2018; Ramasubramanian &

Costantini, 2020). Yet again, Tropp, Uluğ & Uysal (2021) found that intergroup contact, through the mediating pathway of communication, inspired outgroup members' desire to participate in common goals. Biganeh & Young (2021) also discovered that positive communication's significance in fostering leadership and accelerating organizational success is paramount. Finally, intergroup dialogues were found to promote meaningful engagement between different outgroups (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003). Hence, based on the aforementioned evidence of literature that positively linked positive communication and/or its forms with improved relationships as well as anxiety and prejudice reduction, it can be induced that positive communication is potent in nurturing interpersonal and intergroup relationships.



3. METHOD

3.1. Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of Positive Communication Intervention program on interpersonal and intergroup relationships of Ethiopian university students, particularly, Jigjiga University. Accordingly, an eight sessions positive communication training program was assessed for its effectiveness in improving interpersonal and intergroup relationships. A non-equivalent pretest-posttest control group design was used for two groups of participants (treatment and control groups). Before employing the Positive Communication Program, Friendship Maintenance Scale developed by Oswald, Clark & Kelly (2004), and General Intergroup Contact Quantity and contact Quality Scale (CQCQ) developed by Islam & Hewstone (1993) were administered to both groups to measure their interpersonal relationships and intergroup relationships, respectively.

Thereafter, the Positive Communication Training Program consisting of eight sessions was conducted to the experiment group. Meanwhile, there was no intervention program conducted to the control group. After the program is terminated, the above-mentioned scales were re-administered to both groups once again. To test the applicability of the planned Positive Communication program, a single group pretest-posttest design of pilot study was administered with the Ethiopian students studying in Turkey before applying the intervention program to the target experiment group in Ethiopia. The research design is presented in figure 3.1. below.

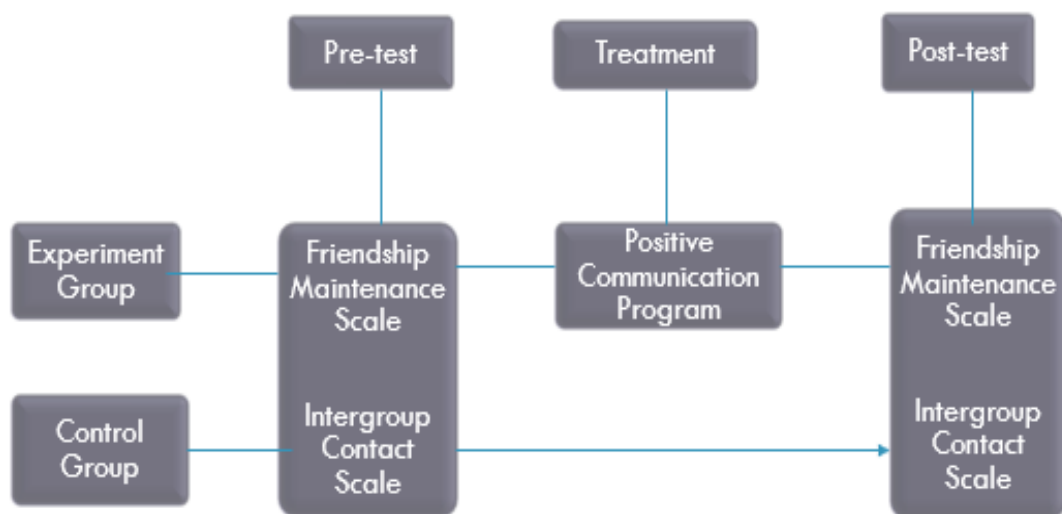


Figure 3.1. Research Design

Data was obtained from the participants at different periods in two sub-studies (the pilot study and the experiment). Table 3.1 shows an overview of the demographic characteristics for each of the sub-studies.

Table 3.1. *Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants*

Variables	Category	Pilot Study				Experiment Study			
		M	SD	f	%	M	SD	f	%
Sample size	(n)			15	100			97	100
Age	M (SD) ^a	25.13	3.70			22.67	2.63		
Gender	M			12	80			65	67
	F			3	20			32	33
Ethnicity	Oromo			13	86.7			35	36.1
	Somali			-				24	24.7
	Amhara			1	6.7			23	23.7
	Nuer			-				5	5.2
	SNNP ^b			1	6.7			4	4.1
	Afar			-				2	2.1
	Tigre			-				2	2.1
	Harari			-				1	1.0
	Shinasha			-				1	1.0
Religion	Islam			15	100			47	48.5
	Orthodox			-				39	40.2
	Protestant			-				11	11.3
Year of Stay	M (SD) ^a	2.27	1.100			3.13	.603		

Note: M (SD)^a = M, mean; SD, standard deviation, f -frequency; % - percentage. SNNP^b refers to members of ethnic groups inhabiting SNNPRS which included, Kenbatta, Hadeya, Wolayita, and Gurage, etc.

3.1.1. Participants of the Pilot Study

In order to test the applicability of the planned Positive Communication program, a single group pretest-posttest design was used with the Ethiopian students, studying in Turkey. In this regard, the participants of the pilot study were 15 Ethiopian students (12 male and three female) studying in higher education institutions in different cities of Turkey during the academic year 2020-2021 (see Table 3.1). The average age of the

sample was 25.13 (SD=3.70). These participants were recruited after confirming their consent at the beginning of the pilot study. The pilot study of the Positive Communication Intervention program started in the first week of January 2021 and ended in the second week of February 2021. The Positive Communication Intervention program for the pilot group was done virtually due to the difficulty of access to the participants face-to-face owing to the global pandemics of COVID-19 restrictions such as lockdown and travel ban.

3.1.2. Participants of the Experiment Studies

Following the researcher's offer, a total of 157 Jigjiga university students showed an interest in taking part in the study. Demographically, the participants varied in gender, age, ethnic background, religion, department, and duration of stay at the university. The participants were briefed on the general rules, inclusion criteria, and the purpose of the program. They were also asked to fill inquiry form with the following measures: demographic questionnaire, Friendship Maintenance, and Intergroup Contact Scales. A consent to take part in the study, the suitability of the group program to their personal objectives, their commitment to attend all sessions, and the suitability of their class schedule in relation to the possible time gaps to run the Positive Communication Intervention program were among the inclusion criteria. As a result of the inadequacy of their class schedule, unexpected irregularities in the exam calendars and class schedules, incompatibility of the training location for participants coming from the other campus, and unrelated expectations about the intervention program's general objectives, 37 of the participants were excluded. Accordingly, after confirming their consent, 120 students who attended the orientation session and completed the measures during the pre-intervention assessment were taken into the interventional study.

Out of the 120 participants who were assigned to the Positive Communication Intervention program ($n = 62$), and no-treatment control ($n = 58$) groups, 23 of them dropped out (13 from the Positive Communication Program, and 10 from the no-treatment control groups) and they did not complete the post-intervention survey. The final sample size of 97 (49 experiment, 48 control) yielded a participation rate of 80%. The average age of the sample was 22.67 (SD=2.63). Some of the participants who missed some of the sessions claimed a change in their regular class schedule as the primary reason for their inability to attend every session in a row. As a result, group members agreed to hold

two sessions each week during the final two weeks of the group program. The first six sessions of the group were facilitated one session per week. Only those who had attended at least five sessions and filled all the measures were incorporated in the analyses during the post-intervention assessments.

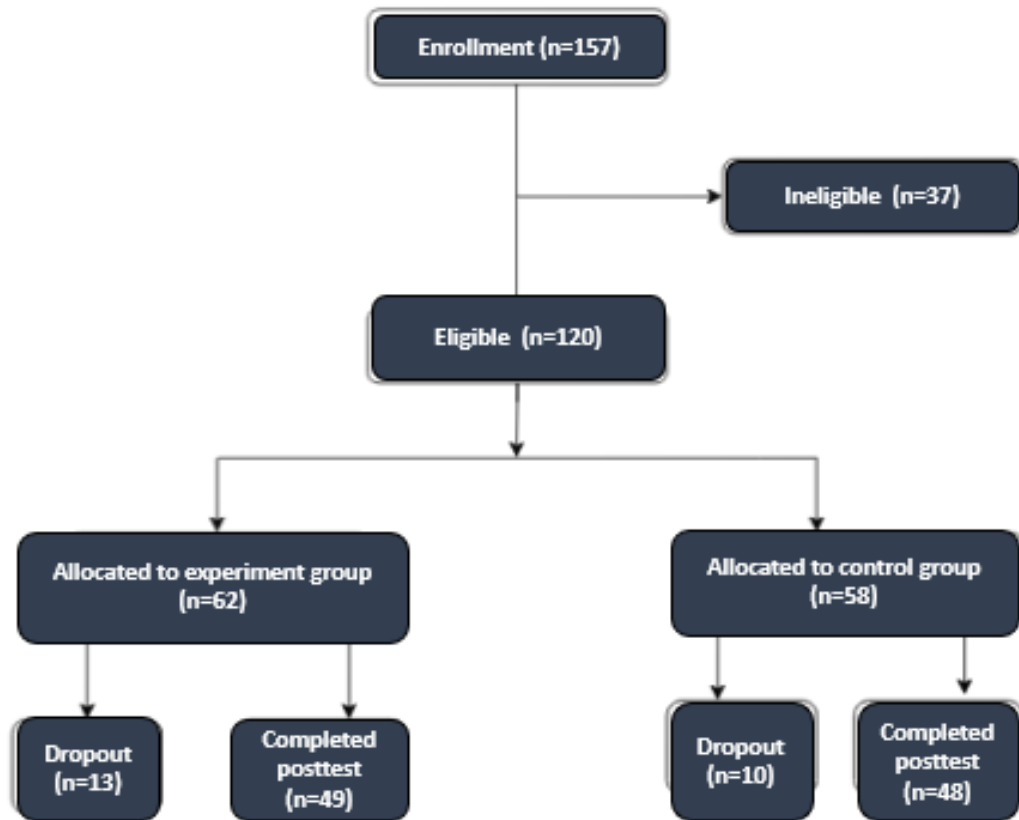


Figure 3.2. *Flowchart of the Study Participants*

3.2. Data Collection Instrument

In order to figure out the participants' levels of interpersonal and intergroup relationships, a demographic information questionnaire developed by the researcher and the Friendship Maintenance Scale (FM) developed and validated by Oswald, Clark, & Kelly (2004) and General Intergroup Contact Quantity and contact Quality Scale (CQCQ) developed by Islam & Hewstone (1993) were employed.

3.2.1. Demographic Information Questionnaire

The researcher developed a demographic information questionnaire with the aim of understanding about the participants' age, gender, ethnicity, religion, year of study, and department (See. Table 3.1). Additionally, along with the demographic information

questionnaire, participants were also provided a time schedule on which they may mark acceptable days of the week and times for their participation.

3.2.2. Friendship Maintenance (FM) Scale

Friendship Maintenance scale was employed with the aim of measuring the interpersonal relationships of the participants. Friendship Maintenance scale and its dimensions (positivity, supportiveness, openness, and interaction) provided reliable and valid measures of the quality of interpersonal relationships in young adults, especially for college students (Oswald, Clark, & Kelly, 2004:439). It has also been used to study the effectiveness of relationships, relationship satisfaction, and friendship maintenance. The friendship Maintenance scale has both long and short versions with 37 items and 20 items, respectively. For this thesis, the short form was chosen since they typically contain the most robust components in terms of both content and metric quality (Kořar, 2020). It has 20 items and is made up of 4 dimensions, each dimension containing 5 items. The four dimensions are positivity (e.g., How often do you try to make your best friend laugh?), supportiveness (e.g., How often do you compliment your best friend?), openness (e.g., How often do you give advice to your best friend?), and interaction (e.g., How often do you go to social gatherings with your best friend?). Participants were asked to indicate how often they engage in a specific behaviour in their friendship using a 7-point scale (1 = never, 7 = frequently). There was one reverse coded item in the first subscale, i.e., the third item under positivity. The internal consistency coefficients of the Friendship Maintenance scale in this study were .854 for the pre-test and .885 for the post-test, respectively.

3.2.3. General Intergroup Contact Quantity and contact Quality Scale (CQCQ)

General Intergroup Contact Quantity and contact Quality Scale (CQCQ) was an instrument first created by Islam & Hewstone (1993) to determine the frequency with which an individual has direct intergroup encounters (contact quantity) and the extent to which face-to-face intergroup encounters are experienced. Later on, it was used and adapted successfully by numerous studies to measure intergroup relationships (including cross-group friendship, outgroup attitude, outgroup prejudice, and intergroup anxiety (Lolliot, et al. 2015) for both adult and student samples in different countries (e.g., Voci & Hewstone, 2003; Tausch, Tam., Hewstone, Kenworrthy, and Cairns, 2007). The scale

has 10 items and two dimensions, each dimension having five items. The two dimensions are Contact Quantity (e.g., How often have you engaged in informal conversations with outgroup members?) and Contact Quality (e.g., To what extent did you experience the contact with [outgroup] as pleasant?). The five contact quality items assess the overall valence of the contact experience, while the five contact quantity items measure how many contacts the respondents have had with the specified outgroup in various circumstances. This scale also uses a seven-point bipolar rating scale. There is no reverse-coded item in the scale. The internal consistency coefficients of the General Intergroup Contact Quantity and contact Quality Scale in this study were .846 for the pre-test and .826 for the post-test, respectively.

3.3. Positive Communication Intervention Program (PCIP)

The goal of this study was to develop and implement a Positive Communication skills program for university students with the intent of enhancing interpersonal and intergroup relationships. The program's draft was designed with the theoretical frameworks of Positive Communication in mind. Accordingly, the six behaviours of positive communication in the Model of Positive Communication (Mirivel, 2014) were embodied as the main content of this program (see fig. 2.5). In addition to these six behaviours, an introduction and conclusion parts were included with the intention of giving the participants an opportunity to get to know the purpose and process of the program at the beginning and to reflect on it upon its termination, respectively. The six behaviours of positive communication along the introduction and conclusion make the contents of the program eight sessions. Each session is designed to consist of different activities that trigger the participants' awareness and enhance their skills of interpersonal and intergroup relationships. Moreover, literature about positive communication, interpersonal relationship, and intergroup relationship among university students (Ethiopian higher education context) were considered.

The Positive Communication Intervention Program (PCIP) was created to help guide the sessions with the objective of enhancing positive relationships. After piloting for their contribution to amplifying group members' potential resources of relationships, scientifically validated, and verified activities (the gratitude exercise, Active Constructive Responding, Intergroup dialogue, perspective-taking, Strength Conversation, and so on (see table 3.2) were integrated into the program to leverage the training resources and

amplify the participants' understanding. This was done with the goal of increasing the likelihood of using tactics that best suit the intended purpose, highlighting their importance, and suggesting future studies to investigate the effects of various techniques in positive communication programs. After that, the draft was revised by the advisor and independent experts in terms of the clarity of the activities and appropriateness of the session exercises. After making the necessary revisions and modifications, the final version of the program with eight sessions was used for the pilot study. The contents of the program which is designed into eight sessions (introduction, greeting, asking, complimenting, disclosing, encouraging, listening & conclusion, respectively) are discussed in the subsequent section.

Session 1: Introduction

The program's first session seeks to introduce group members to one another, introduce them to the group's purpose and structure, establish participants' expectations from the program, and alleviate their initial uneasiness about being in a new group. Following a quick welcome and expression of gratitude for being a part of the group, the participants were asked to briefly identify themselves by providing their names and any demographic information that was necessary for the group's acquaintance.

After getting group members acquainted with each other, they were informed about the purpose and structure of the training program. The participants were informed that the purpose of the program was to initiate opportunities to enhance their interpersonal and intergroup relationships by practicing positive communication activities and to discuss and try to find mutual treatments to the possible challenges that might obstruct their interpersonal and intergroup relationships. Informing the participants that they may maintain a positive relationship if they adhere to these purposes of the program, the researcher encouraged them to work cooperatively throughout training sessions.

The next activity involved group members suggesting some ground rules that would help to make the group safe and productive. Punctuality, attendance, secrecy, respect for others, taking initiative to communicate sentiments, creativity and trying new possible alternatives in and outside the group were the most crucial rules. Group members were encouraged to state the ground rules in their own words. The researcher added or clarified any ground rules that were necessary but not mentioned by group members.

The session was finalized by asking the group members to describe *what went well* for them, or to talk about the things they learned about themselves during the session. The group members were encouraged to notice times when they come across positive communication behaviours and inspired by them during their interaction with the other members and figure out how those situations could be utilized to transform their relationships. Finally, as homework, the participants were instructed to write down their expectations from the program, using the three blessings (what-went-well) exercise as a daily journaling exercise at the end of each session, with the goal of increasing motivation and redirecting attention toward positive thinking.

Session 2: Greeting

The second session aims to help the group members create human contact and open interpersonal dialogues through greeting. Thus, the group members were invited to practice the positive greeting exercise. They were asked to initiate the process of creating human contact with other members of the group and open-up sincere and passionate conversation, not by a simple utterance of “Good morning or Hello”, but by positive intention, carefully selected words, and smiling face. When possible, they were encouraged to greet the other group members in their native language as it establishes a good foundation for contact and fosters positive relationships. They were also encouraged to use gratifying verbal expressions and gestures as well as to give their interlocutors full attention and care about their concerns when greeting them.

The second activity invites the group members to use positive language (nice words, positive body language, etc.) during their greetings. Thus, during this session, the participants were advised to use positive language that facilitates positive communication processes. They were advised to accentuate the positive, mindfully select their vocabulary, and use constructive feedback when interacting with their group members. They were asked to use encouraging words and positive expressions and avoid discouraging and negative expressions. Smiling and sharing funny personal stories were also encouraged to build stronger relationships among the group members. To help them easily practice this activity, they were provided with a list of examples of positive communication (Socha & Beck, 2015). Overall, this activity was intended to create opportunities for connection and share a friendly atmosphere that is full of joy and laughter.

Finally, the participants were shown a short video about ‘Positive Greeting at the Door’ to raise their awareness of how greeting can create a positive school environment. Following the greeting exercise and the video, they were asked to think of and discuss in their groups a real-life experience or a scenario when someone greeted them with a memorable greeting and how that movement of communication affected them as well as their relationships. Then, reflections from the participants about the impact of greeting were shared with others.

Session 3: Asking

The third session focuses on discovering new people and their untold stories. This session aims to help the group members approach each other and build trust before unearthing their stories. Thus, the group members were asked to be in a pair and ask open-ended questions to discover each other more deeply. When practicing asking open-ended questions, the participants were informed that the intention is not to judge or evaluate those in the interaction but to understand their concerns and learn about their stories while empathizing with them. With the first activity of this session, the participants were asked to practice asking to be able to discover about each other using *open-ended questions* in pairs. They may ask their pairs to tell them about themselves, their life stories, their expectations for the future, or any detail that may arouse their feelings that they want to share.

When practicing asking, the participants were also encouraged to engage in a dialogic communication with a partner applying the principles of unconditional positive regard and memorable messages. The intention was to try to accept people and support them without evaluating them based on who they are or what they say. Thus, they were advised to approach their interlocutors with openness, compassion, acceptance, and genuineness without offending and evaluating. In this activity, the participants were encouraged to ask such simple questions as “How are you doing?” and “Are you okay?” because it is believed that these questions have the power to trigger the emotions of people and encourage them to share their deep feelings and *peak communications*. After doing this activity, at the pair level, the experiences and stories of the group members were shared and reflected on with others.

Session 4: Complimenting

The fourth session aims at helping the participants to practice the act of complimenting. During the fourth session of the positive communication program, the participants were given opportunities to practice complimenting through different activities. The first activity invites them to think of the best compliments they received from others and evaluate how these compliments have affected them in the long term with the intention of understanding the influence of compliments in cultivating interpersonal relationships.

In the next activity, the group members were asked to practice a gratitude visit exercise in which they express their deep appreciation to someone who has made a big difference in their life yet has never been properly thanked (Seligman, 2011). Unlike the former activity, which was about the compliment received, this activity is about compliments to others. To practice the activity, the participants were asked to think of someone in their relationship (be it a friend, family member, teacher, or colleague) who positively influenced their life yet did not receive due praise. Next, they were advised to write down a letter of gratitude describing what the compliment-receiving person did for them and how their actions made a difference in their life. Lastly, they were encouraged to read the letter (face-to-face if possible) and report the feeling they both experienced after the gratitude visit to the group.

While finalizing the session, the participants watched a “*Validation*” movie - a fable about a parking attendant who gives his customers free compliments about their appearances and their inner qualities. Then, they were asked to reflect on this short film and the activity based on their observation.

Session 5: Disclosing

The fifth session aims at helping the group members to practice disclosing. Disclosing is a positive communication behaviour that fosters intimacy and deepens relationships. During this session, the group members were requested to disclose themselves to one another and deepen their relationship by sharing and caring about each other, as well as by keeping secrets. Now, given that a close relationship and trust have already been maintained, the group members were already in a safe atmosphere to disclose themselves to one other. Of course, they were warned not to share very sensitive private information about themselves lest they should be exposed to risks. Here, again, there are two activities aiming to help the group members to practice the act of disclosing.

The first activity was about self-disclosure using the *Johari Window exercise*. It was about disclosing and assessing the level of one's self-disclosure during interpersonal interactions. The Johari window model is a framework designed to inform about our interpersonal relationships and how to nurture them using disclosing techniques (Luft & Ingham, 1955). This activity asks the participants to disclose themselves to the other members of the groups using self-disclosure techniques as per the Johari window model (see, figure 2.9). To do so they were provided with the Johari adjectives worksheet (the online link) to practice the exercise (see, table 2.1). Generally, they are encouraged to open themselves up by enlarging their *open self area* using self-disclosure and positive feedback. For those who had the chance of completing the exercise online, a link for the free Johari Window exercise was provided (<https://kevan.org/johari>). Finally, the group members were asked to share their results and reflect on them.

The next activity is practicing *intergroup dialogue*. The goal of this session was to help participants become more comfortable with and skilled at discussing challenging topics in order to establish pleasant, meaningful, and long-lasting cross-group connections. The researcher presented the concept of Intergroup Dialogue to the participants and then, provided them with a real-time scenario to discuss. When practicing intergroup dialogue, LARA (Listen, Affirm, Respond, and Ask questions) activity was utilized given that it is a method that builds respect and common ground between people in conversation, allowing them to explore differences more openly and honestly (Mandhana & Caruso, 2022).

In this practice, an opportunity was created for the participants to talk about the controversial and “hot topic” real-world issues so that they practice and develop the skill of empathetic listening. The purpose here is to give the opportunity of viewing the world from others' points of view and sympathize with them. Inherently, people tend to get offended when their self-interest is not preserved while debating with others. However, dialogic communication urges us to remain calm and control our egos in such situations and recognize others' views by listening to them actively. Listening genuinely and remaining in the dialogue while still holding our attitude, even if the other party's ideas are irritating us is a character that requires an act of courage. This is what makes debate and dialogue different from each other (Jessop & Milofsky, 2014). Dealing with the “hot topics” often provide openings for participants to work through conflicts. Accordingly,

after discussing the issue raised in the activities, the participants reflected on lessons they obtained from the session.

The final activity was practicing disclosing using the “*I*”-statement. In this activity, the group members were asked to practice how to express their emotions and feelings without being offensive by using “*I*” statements. “*I*” statements are simple forms of constructive communication that allow people to express their sentiments without being defensive, which is especially useful when they believe they are being blamed by others. To help them better understand, practice, and easily master the technique, the participants were provided with the following examples and scenarios:

Examples

Blaming: *You always come to your job so late. You are so careless!*

“*I*” Statement: *I feel concerned when you come late. I am afraid you do not care.*

Practice

Scenario: *A friend of yours with whom you had an appointment to go to a graduation ceremony did not appear. She did not notify her absence, nor did she apologize.*

“*I*”-Statement: _____.

Session 6: Encouraging

The sixth session aims to help the participants to practice encouraging. Encouraging is a speech act that improves another person’s sense of self and enables that person to keep growing in the face of adversity, obstacles, or challenges (Mirivel, 2014). The purpose of encouraging is to positively affect others. At this juncture, the group members were advised to encourage one another by cheering the accomplishment and success their friends are reaching. This encouragement could be through words of mouth or facial expression or body language or in any other form may be by written letters or giving gifts. Various exercises were carried out in this session.

The first activity was about *Encouraging*. This activity is twofold: encouragement received and encouraging others. In the encouragement received practice, the group members were asked to list five key accomplishments in their life. After reflecting on each accomplishment, they were requested to identify an encouraging message that they

received from someone for each success. Then, they were told to write down the specific words spoken to encourage them. The second activity was about *encouraging others* by delivering an encouraging message to others. To do so, the participants were advised to identify the person they want to encourage by reflecting on their strengths and achievements using positive and inspiring language.

The third activity was giving positive and constructive feedback also known as *Active Constructive Responding – ACR*. The purpose of this activity was to provide participants with an opportunity of practicing how to respond and react to the good news they receive from an important figure in their relationships (be it a wife, friend, or mother). Thus, the participants were advised to listen carefully when people they care about (in close relationships) report good events to them and try to respond actively and constructively based on Gable's matrix of active-constructive responding.

As the last and optional activity, the participants practiced *Strengths Conversation* (an exercise made to unearth people's potentials and strengths based on a face-to-face conversation). At the end of the session, as a home-take assignment, the participants were requested to take the Values in Action (VIA) survey (<https://www.viacharacter.org>) and identify their top 5-character strengths or signature strengths. Then, they were asked to write a story about how these strengths influenced them and the people in their relationship. Afterward, they were asked to invite their friend to take the VIA survey and do the same. Then, they would sit down together and make a strengths conversation as well as discuss how their interpersonal relationships were affected by the Strengths conversation. And finally, they were encouraged to share their story with people in the program.

Session 7: Listening

The aim of this session was to help the participants practice the act of empathetic and mindful listening. In positive communication, listening is different; it is about listening deeply and empathetically giving oneself fully to the interlocutor (the person we are listening to). When listening to someone in such a way, it signals that we are valuing that person. Empathetic listening aims to enhance our understanding of other people and such activities have the potential to generate compassion, forgiveness, and such positive communication behaviours are directly related to and have the power to strengthen relationships (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). Hence, the activities used in this session require the participants to put themselves into the shoes of the person they are listening

to and give them full attention with compassion by disregarding their own personal issues. Like the previous session, here also there are several activities to help the participants practice this usually overlooked yet crucial skill of positive communication. Thus, the following activities were used to enable the mastery of listening.

The first activity was *empathetic* or deep listening. Deep listening is about being present with another person giving them full attention and refraining from judging, interrupting, or evaluating them. The purpose is to practice deep listening by interviewing a friend about his or her childhood and asking as many questions as possible. Bearing in mind the role deep listening could play in transcending interpersonal relationships, the participants were required to assess the challenges they faced when listening deeply, and the common barriers that they experience as a listener. They were also encouraged to reflect on their own experiences when they have felt deeply listened to by another person.

The second activity was a *roleplay* of listening with *unconditional positive regard*. Based on the homework given in the previous session in which the participants wrote about their Strengths Conversation, they were asked to be in pairs and share the conversation again. One of the pairs took the role of speaker and the other the role of listener. So, the speaker would identify a signature strength that he or she possessed, and without telling the listener what that strength is, he or she would describe a time when he or she successfully applied that strength. And then the listener was given the responsibility of just being a good listener; having good eye contact, paying close attention and focusing, and allowing the interlocutor to speak freely. The listener should be on the lookout for positives in the other person's tale while listening. They were advised to approach their interlocutors with openness, compassion, acceptance, and genuineness without being judgmental of their interlocutors' demographic identities such as gender, ethnicity, and religion. When the tale is ended, the listener might assist the speaker in savoring it by asking questions about the amazing events that occurred. The speaker would next be told what strengths he or she noticed in the story. After the listener shared with the speaker the strengths she or he noticed in the narrative, the speaker and the listener reversed roles, with the speaker becoming the listener and the listener becoming the speaker.

Lastly, in the third activity, the participants were given the opportunity to consider the point of view of the other person using the *perspective-taking* exercise. To do so, the famous *Young Woman or Old Woman* optical illusion image (given in Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*) was displayed to them to help them practice perspective-taking. First, the group was divided into two and was given 10 seconds to see different pictures in which either the young or old lady was relatively obvious. Then, this picture was displayed to all, and they were asked to tell what they saw: a young lady or an old woman. upon completing the activity, the class was divided into two groups manipulated by their 10 seconds experience of the image they were provided with. The two groups had different perspectives and based on those individual and group differences. Based on their activity, takeaways were discussed. Covey's (2004) activity emphasizes the powerful reality that we all interpret things differently because of the influences we face, many of which we are unaware of. The most important lesson we can take away from this activity is that our point of view shapes a lot of our reality.



Figure 3.3: *Young or Old Woman Image* (Covey, 2004, p.26)

Session 8: Conclusion/Reflection

This session brought the program to the finishing point. Here, the participants reflected on the program as well as gave feedback on its achievement. Before the session finished, participants were involved in communication games with the intention of boosting closeness and group relationships. The exercises had the capacity to enhance participant trust and speed up the formation of team spirit as well as the completion of group tasks. The edutainment aspect of the activities proved successful in generating a positive atmosphere and participation among participants. At the end, the participants were also given time to share their experiences and opinions about participating in this program. The researcher discussed with the participants whether the objectives of the program were achieved or not by referring to the program objectives. Finally, an assessment of the program was made using the post-test measure.

Table 3.2 The Timeline of the Positive Communication Intervention program

Session	Content	Objective	Exercise
1	Introduction	To get acquainted with each other and with the program	Pre-test assessment, brainstorming (what-went-well), discussing rules
2	<i>Greeting</i>	To create opportunities for connection & contact	Positive Greeting Exercise, Using positive language
3	<i>Asking</i>	To discover others more deeply	Asking Open-ended Questions, Peak Communication (Savouring)
4	<i>Complimenting</i>	To make others feel good & affect them in a positive way	Gratitude visit exercise, Reflection on “ <i>Validation</i> ” movie
5	<i>Disclosing</i>	To foster intimacy & deepen the relationship	“I”-Statement, Intergroup Dialogue, Johari Window exercise
6	<i>Encouraging</i>	To give instrumental support through communication	Encouraging, Active Constructive Responding, Strength Conversation
7	<i>Listening</i>	To develop interpersonal transcendence	Empathic listening, Unconditional Positive Regard, Perspective-taking
8	Conclusion	To terminate the program	Reflections on the program, games, Post-test assessment

3.4. Piloting the program

The pilot study has a single group pre-test and posttest design, in which Ethiopian students attending their higher education in Turkey, received Positive Communication training program in eight sessions. The positive communication designed program was piloted with Ethiopian university students pursuing their university education at different universities in Turkey. The participants were selected through a notice on virtual grouping of the Ethiopian students on different social networking sites. The participation was conducted based on the willingness of the participants and sessions of each program took 90 minutes. During the pilot program, the participants were given opportunities to practice various verified and realistic positive communication exercises, as they were also given the flexibility of practicing culturally relevant new activities to facilitate successful completion of the program based on the reflections obtained from the participants during the early sessions.

In order to test the validity of the Positive Communication Intervention Program (PCIP) and its effect on the levels of interpersonal and intergroup relationships of Ethiopian students, a single-group pretest- posttest design was followed for the pilot group. Accordingly, 15 Ethiopian students attending their university education at various universities in Turkey participated in the pilot study. The changes in their levels of interpersonal and intergroup relationships across time points (pretest and posttest) were examined using the paired sample t-Test. Accordingly, the results of the analyses for intragroup showed changes in their interpersonal and intergroup relationships based on the Friendship maintenance and Intergroup contact scales during the pre-intervention and post-eight-week intervention assessments. The paired sample t-test result revealed that there was a significant change in the participants' levels improving their interpersonal and intergroup relationships, the sum of the mean scores at pretest ($M=101.86$) was raised to ($M=111.00$) at posttest for friendship maintenance (FM), while intergroup contact (CQCQ) mean score at pretest ($M=43.06$) increased to ($M=53.26$) at post-test. The student's t-Test result also shows $t(14) = 2.77$, $P = .015$, $d = .715$ for FM, and $t(14) = 10.769$, $P < .001$, $d = 2.781$ for CQCQ. Test of normality Shapiro-wilk for FM ($P=0.885$), for CQCQ ($P=0.957$). The Skewness for FM ($-.844$) and Kurtosis (0.358), while the Skewness for CQCQ ($-.094$) and Kurtosis ($-.822$). Thus, the results indicate that the pilot study of the program was effective in bringing significant changes in the participants' use

of these positive communication practices, suggesting that the Positive Communication Intervention program was potent and can be implemented to manage the interpersonal and intergroup conflicts.

3.5. The Preliminary Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 21 was used to conduct statistical analyses. Prior to conducting a statistical analysis, assumption tests were made to determine the normality and homogeneity of variance. Tests of normality were performed using the Shapiro-Wilks test (the W test statistics) to check whether the data were suitable to conduct parametric statistical analyses. A Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$) (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965; Razali & Wah, 2011) and a visual inspection of their histograms, normal Q-Q plots, and box plots showed that the mean scores of the participants were normally distributed for both the scales, with skewness of 0.537 ($SE = 0.245$) and kurtosis 0.438 ($SE = 0.485$) for FM and skewness of 0.154 ($SE = 0.245$) and kurtosis 0.690 ($SE = 0.485$) for CQCQ, respectively (Cramer, 1998; Cramer & Howitt, 2004; Doane & Seward, 2011).

Additionally, Levene's test was performed to check the assumptions that the variances in each of the groups were not significantly different at the pre-test assessment. In this regard, the results show that Levene's $F(1,95) = .091$, $P = .764$ for Friendship Maintenance scale. However, because the Intergroup Contact scale did not meet the equal variance in the Levene's test, Welch's t -test was conducted. Accordingly, the two-tailed P -value of the CQCQ also showed that the difference was not statistically significant $t(76) = .6172$, $P = .5390$ suggesting that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met (i.e., not violated) for the sample at the baseline. A Levene's test verified the equality of variances in the samples (homogeneity of variance) ($p > .05$) (Martin & Bridgmon, 2012). As the data satisfies the assumptions for the normality of distribution and homogeneity of the variances, the parametric statistical analyses were used for the FM & CQCQ measures.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study derived from the analysis of the statistical data for the quasi-experimental study. The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of positive communication on the interpersonal and intergroup relationships of Ethiopian university students. Guided by the purpose and nature of the research questions, the analyses were grouped into various subsections.

Accordingly, first, the analyses fold up into results related to interpersonal relationships and intergroup relationships based upon the two dependent variables measured in this study. Then, under each of these two categories, the results of the analyzed data were further divided into within-group and between-group differences based on the objective of the research questions which seek to measure the differences between the groups (experimental and control) and within each of the groups at different time points (pre-test and post-test). In this way, the analysis results of the effects of the intervention for each group are presented in terms of each of the outcome variables.

4.1. Results Related to Interpersonal Relationships

This section presents the results related to the first variable which tests the interpersonal relationship of the participants measured by the friendship maintenance scale. It presents the results of the analyses from the comparison of the within-group differences and between-group differences across the pre-and post-intervention in the sequence of each of the research questions.

4.1.1. Results Related to Within Group Differences of FM

To determine whether there was a significant difference within the groups, the analyses were made guided by the first and second research questions as indicated below. While the first research question is concerned with the within the control group differences/changes, the second research question is concerned with the within the experiment group changes in the mean score of the FM scale before and after the treatment, respectively.

Research question (1):

- Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the control group's interpersonal relationships at pretest and at posttest?

This research question examines if there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the control group in the measures of interpersonal relationships. The intention, here, is to check if the control group which did not take the intervention would/not show significant differences at different points in time. Accordingly, the descriptive statistics and t-test results for the control group at pre and post-tests are given in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Within Group Comparisons of FM for the Control Group (n=48)

FM	N	Mean	SD	Diff	t (47)	p	Cohen's d
Pretest	48	93.417	17.774	3.46	1.13	.26	.16
Post test	48	96.875	17.962				

Notes. *Diff* = the difference between the mean scores. *t* = the t statistic based on the degrees of freedom. *P* = the probability of a result simply by chance. *d* = the Cohen's d report of the effect size.

Based on the assessment of the within-group comparison of the interpersonal relationship of the control group across time, a significant difference was not observed, indicating that the control group remained almost similar in terms of their interpersonal relationship during the study time. Indeed, it was expected that there would be no significant within-group differences for the control group and the results obtained from the paired t-test also confirmed this assumption. Using a .05 level of probability as a frame of reference, the group demonstrated a nonsignificant difference between the pre-test and post-test period ($t(47) = 1.13$, $P = .26$). The effect size was also found to be small ($d = .16$). This analysis establishes that there was no significant within-group difference for the control group.

Research question (2):

- Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the experiment group's interpersonal relationships at pretest and at posttest?

The second research question seeks to answer whether there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test interpersonal relationships scores of the experiment group. The within-group assessment for this question displays that the experiment group scored higher on the post-test than on the pre-test ($t(48) = 5.22$, $P < .001$), with a relatively large effect size ($d = .75$). These results provide statistical support for the hypothesis that the participants in the experiment group would score higher on friendship maintenance at post-test than at pre-test with a significant mean difference of 14.59 (*Diff* column).

Table 4.2: Within Group Comparisons of FM for the Experiment Group (n=49)

FM	N	Mean	SD	<i>Diff</i>	t (48)	p	Cohen's d
Pre-test	49	95.31	15.29				
Post-test	49	109.89	15.81	14.59	5.22	< .001	.75

Notes. *Diff* = the difference between the mean scores. *t* = the t statistic based on the degrees of freedom. *P* = the probability of a result simply by chance. *d* = the Cohen's d report of the effect size.

4.1.2. Results Related to Between Group Differences of FM

In this section, results from the comparison of the differences in the mean scores of FM scale between the control and experiment groups were presented. An independent t-test was conducted to test the difference between the two groups after intervention and the results are presented in the subsequent subsections. To determine whether there was a significant difference between the control and experiment groups in terms of their FM scale's mean scores, the analysis was made guided by the third research question as indicated below.

Research question (3):

- Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the control and experiment group's interpersonal relationships at pretest and at posttest?

The third research question intends to answer whether there exist significant differences between the control and experiment groups in their scores of the measures of interpersonal relationships after the implementation of the treatment program.

Table 4.3: Between Experimental (n = 49) and Control (n = 47) Groups Comparison of FM at Post-test

FM	N	Mean	SD	Diff	t (95)	p	Cohen's d
Experiment group	49	109.89	15.81				
Control group	48	96.87	17.96	13.02	3.79	< .001	.77

Notes. *Diff* = the difference between the mean scores. *t* = the t statistic based on the degrees of freedom. *P* = the probability of a result simply by chance. *d* = the Cohen's d report of the effect size.

Based on the descriptive statistics and t-test result, a significant difference was observed between the experiment and control group at post-intervention favouring the group which received the treatment. The independent t-test for the between-group comparison reveals that the effect of the intervention program was significant ($t(95) = 3.79$, $P = < .001$). The obtained difference was also noticed to be large ($d = .77$). These results indicate that participation in the positive communication intervention program contributed to the improvement of interpersonal relationships for the participants of the experiment group as compared to the control group. The changes in the mean scores of the interpersonal relationship scale between the two groups across time points are visibly demonstrated in figure 4.1. The figure clearly exhibited that though the two groups had relatively similar mean scores at the onset, their mean scores after the implementation of the intervention was significantly changed in favour of the experiment group. In the meanwhile, the control group maintained approximately the same mean scores of interpersonal relationships throughout the study.

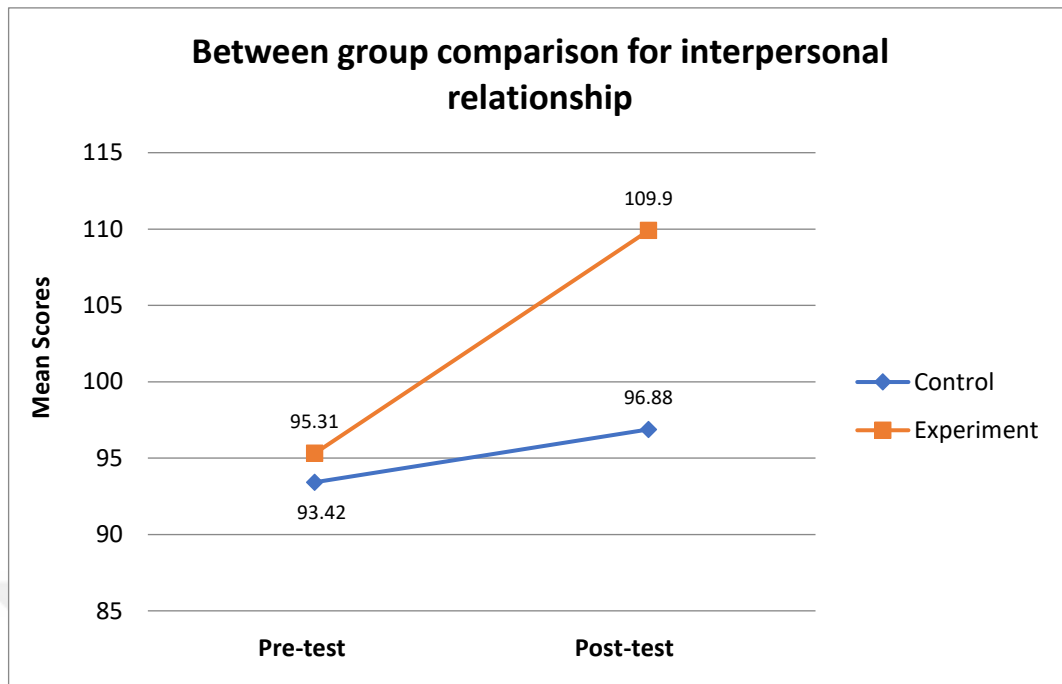


Figure 4.1. Changes in the mean scores of interpersonal relationships between the time points and among groups

Figure 4.1. shows that there were significant differences between the control and experiment groups after the intervention was given to the experiment group, though they were initially roughly similar in their interpersonal relationship level at the pre-test. The increase in the mean score of friendship maintenance in the experiment group at the post-test as opposed to the control group is attributed to the effect of the intervention program given that the mean scores of the groups at the pre-test were not significantly different. Thus, these results indicate that the designed Positive Communication Intervention program had a positive influence on the interpersonal relationships of the participants in the experiment group and improved their overall interpersonal interactions.

4.2. Results Related to Intergroup Relationships

This section presents the results of the analyses of the second dependent variable of the study, which is related to the intergroup relationships, assessed using the intergroup contact scale. Depending on the nature of the tested data elicited by the research questions. Accordingly, this section is further categorized into two folds: results of the tests obtained from the analyses of the differences between the control and experiment groups and results of the tests obtained from within each group across the pre and post-intervention in the sequence of each of the research questions.

4.2.1. Results Related to Within Groups Differences of CQCQ

The fourth and fifth research questions related to the second dependent variable (intergroup relationship) seek to test whether there were significant changes in each of the control and experiment groups between the testing time points or not. The paired-sample t-test was conducted for this purpose and the t-table and descriptive statistics are provided in table 4.4 and table 4.5. To determine whether there was a significant difference within the groups in terms of their mean scores of CQCQ scale, the analyses were made guided by the fourth and fifth research questions as indicated below. Again, while the fourth research question is concerned with the within the control group differences/changes, the fifth research question is concerned with the within the experiment group changes in the mean score of the FM scale before and after the treatment, respectively.

Research question (4):

- Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the control group's intergroup relationships at pretest and at posttest?

The fourth research question asks if there exists a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the control group in the measures of intergroup relations. The assessment from the paired-sample t-test shows that there was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of the control group. This result indicates that the group's intergroup relationship did not significantly change throughout the time of the study ($t(47) = 1.56, P=.12$), with a small effect size ($d = .225$).

Table 4.4: Within Group Comparisons for Pre-test and Post-test Differences for the Control Group (n=48)

CQCQ	N	Mean	SD	Diff	t (47)	p	Cohen's d
Pretest	48	42.83	12.59	3.9	1.56	.12	.225
Post test	48	46.73	10.95				

Notes. *Diff* = the difference between the mean scores. *t* = the t statistic based on the degrees of freedom. *P* = the probability of a result simply by chance. *d* = the Cohen's d report of the effect size.

Research question (5):

- Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the experiment group's intergroup relationships at pretest and at posttest?

The fifth research question intends to respond whether there was significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experiment group in the measures of intergroup relations. The result of the within-group comparison test for the experiment group revealed that higher mean scores of the intergroup contact were obtained at post-test compared to the pre-test. The difference between the mean score of the group at the pre-test and post-test was statistically highly significant ($P < .001$). The result of effect size (Cohen's $d = .53$) also indicates that the difference is in the range of medium size. Thus, it can be said that participation of the experiment group in the positive communication intervention program has increased the level of their intergroup contact and made a positive influence.

Table 4.5: Within Group Comparisons for Pre-test and Post-test Differences for the Experiment Group ($n=49$)

FM	N	Mean	SD	Diff	t (48)	p	Cohen's d
Pre-test	49	47.28	10.14	5.59	3.73	< .001	.53
Post-test	49	52.87	9.80				

Notes. *Diff* = the difference between the mean scores. *t* = the t statistic based on the degrees of freedom. *P* = the probability of a result simply by chance. *d* = the Cohen's d report of the effect size.

4.2.2. Results Related to Between Groups Differences of CQCQ

This part presents the results of comparison between the control and experiment groups in terms of their CQCQ mean scores after the treatment was administered. To determine whether there was a significant difference between the control and experiment groups in terms of their CQCQ scale's mean scores, the analysis was made guided by the sixth research question as indicated below.

Research question (6):

- Are there significant differences between the mean levels of the control and experiment group's intergroup relationships at pretest and at posttest?

An independent sample t-test was used to test the between-group contrasts at post-test. The intention was to verify if the group that received the treatment would differ or remain the same compared to the group which did not receive the treatment. Results of the independent t-test for the research questions illuminating these between-group differences are presented in figure 4.2. Lastly, the sixth research question was concerned with the assessment of the measures of intergroup relationships after the implementation of the treatment program and the result indicated that there was a significant difference between the control and experiment groups in their scores favouring the experiment group.

Table 4.6: *Between Group Comparison for Pre-test and Post-test Differences for the Experimental (n = 49) and Control Groups (n = 47)*

CQCQ	N	Mean	SD	Diff	t (95)	p	Cohen's d
Experiment group	49	52.87	9.80	6.14	2.92	< .001	.59
Control group	48	46.73	10.95				

Notes. *Diff* = the difference between the mean scores. *t* = the t statistic based on the degrees of freedom. *P* = the probability of a result simply by chance. *d* = the Cohen's d report of the effect size.

The independent test result display that the experimental group reported higher scores in their intergroup relationship after taking the positive communication program. With a medium-size effect of ($d=.59$), the difference between the pre-test and post-test of the experiment group was observed to be statistically significant ($t(95)=2.92, P=.004$). The mean difference of the intergroup contact score ($Diff = 6.14$) was also significant. These results show that the positive communication intervention has contributed to the improvement of the participants' intergroup relations as the group reported higher scores at post-test compared to their scores at pre-test. Therefore, the results are indicators of the effectiveness of the program in boosting positive intergroup relationships, as it can be also noticed in figure 4.2.

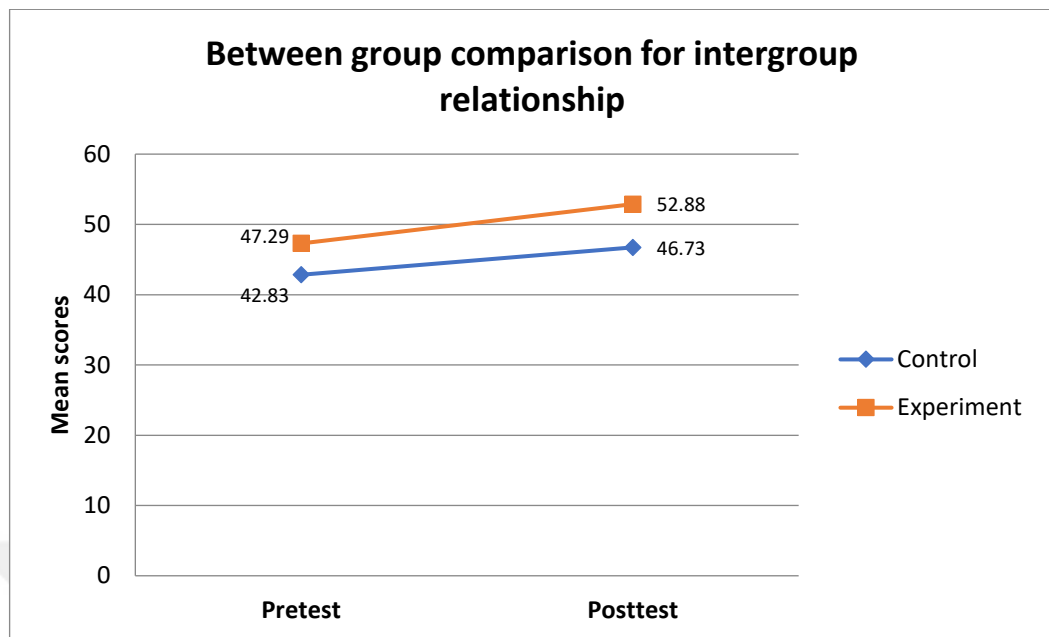


Figure 4.2. *Changes in the mean scores of intergroup relationships between the time points and among groups*

Lastly, it is worth highlighting here that although the magnitude of the mean difference of the between-group comparison of intergroup relationship, as depicted in figure 4.2, was smaller than the magnitude of the mean difference of the interpersonal relationships as noticed in figure 4.1, the post-intervention between-group difference was statistically significant with a p-value of $< .05$ in both variables.

5. DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the impact of positive communication on interpersonal and intergroup relationships among Ethiopian university students. The conclusions derived from the analysis are discussed in this section along with recommendations.

5.1. Discussion

The study compared the mean scores of two groups that participated in it. During the posttest, the positive upward trend in mean scores was recorded in both of the dependent variables (interpersonal relationship, and intergroup relationship) in the group which received the positive communication intervention program compared to the control group. In general, the positive communication training program was associated with the improvement of interpersonal and intergroup relationships as well as the reduction of interactive conflicts.

In the context of higher education institutions, it is difficult to find studies that specifically tested positive communication's effectiveness on interpersonal and intergroup relationships, but scattered studies on the relationship between positive communication and relationships in general have been conducted. In the same vein, though scant, previous literature has sought to link interpersonal relationships and intergroup relationships with various forms of positive communication, and the findings of the current study are positively related to the findings of the previous empirical studies (as will be discussed below).

5.1.1. The Effectiveness of Positive Communication Intervention program on Interpersonal Relationship

The findings of the current study revealed that the positive communication intervention program was effective in promoting the tested dependent variables in this study (i.e., FM & CQCQ). However, though both the interpersonal and intergroup relationships of the participants were positively influenced by the positive communication program, the mean scores and statistical description of the analysis showed that the interpersonal relationships of the participants were markedly affected by the designed program. Thus, the effectiveness of positive communication in promoting interpersonal relationships was more effective than in intergroup relationships.

The results of this study support the URT, which holds that successful intergroup communication requires a decrease in fear and uncertainty (Gudykunst, 2003). It also backs up previous research that links positive communication (and/or specific forms of positive communication) to healthy personal, interpersonal, and intergroup connections. Empirical findings assert that positive communication can promote and facilitate relational health (Pitts & Socha, 2013), foster human relations, and augment human interaction (Mirivel, 2014), strengthen relationships (Socha & Beck, 2015; Frey & White, 2012) and contribute to positive and healthy relationships (Seligman, 2011). It is also in-line with the literature that demonstrates a positive association between the restoration and nurturance of relationships and distinct forms of positive communication such as forgiveness (Kelly, 1998; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010), spiritual communication (Baesler, 2012), peak communication (Mirivel, 2019; Socha, 2019), intergroup dialogue (Alimo, 2012), empathy and self-disclosure (Cissna, 1975), gratitude (Wood, et al. 2010).

On top of that, Mirivel (2014) examined the features of interpersonal communication that are most critical to nurturing relationships, and he identified six (greeting, asking, complimenting, disclosing, encouraging, and listening) that he later labeled as behaviours of positive communication in his model of positive communication. Similarly, Wood et al., (2010) assert that people who regularly practice gratitude are satisfied with their relationships. The literature has also indicated that nonviolent or compassionate communication, a form of positive communication, is an effective approach for establishing healthy interpersonal and intergroup interactions (Rosenberg, 2003; Jasz, 2019). According to previous research, different levels of positive communication, such as empathy, respect, genuineness, and self-disclosure, have been connected to the depth of intimacy and interpersonal relationships (Cissna, 1975).

Several factors might have contributed to the Positive Communication Intervention program's effectiveness in improving the participants' interpersonal relationships. One of the facilitating factors for the Positive Communication's effectiveness could be the nature of the designed positive communication intervention program. The program was designed leveraging Mirivel's (2014) theoretically grounded, rich, and heuristic model of positive communication. The model is guided by theoretical and practical expertise and provides users with a road map on how to effectively communicate to develop enhanced connections with others. It focuses on six behaviours (see fig. 2.5) that are key to practicing positive communication.

This study utilized several practical and verified positive communication techniques along with a set of established positive psychology interventions that might have contributed to the success of the training program. Intergroup dialogue, empathic listening, gratitude visit, “I”-statement, Active-Constructive Responding (positive feedback), mindful communication, Johari window exercise, the three blessings (what-went-well), Strength Conversation, and the other exercises (see, table 3.2) designed to elicit the interpersonal and intergroup relationships of the participants might have made significant positive changes. The exercises employed were robust in motivating and getting the participants work on the enhancement of their interpersonal and intergroup relationships. The participants acknowledged in their reflections that the positive communication program had a good impact on their understanding of the value of fostering healthy relationships as well as their positive social skills. Their attention was particularly drawn to the exercises involving the three blessings, empathy, active listening, and disclosing.

The opportunity to practice these positive communication activities in the context of Ethiopia's ongoing intergroup conflicts highlighted the value of such programs to participants. The program provided the participants with an eye-opening experience, allowing them to reconsider and value the importance of cultivating positive relationships with those in their immediate environment. These positive techniques have the advantage of being theoretically grounded and ensuring both personal as well as relational well-being. (Kobau, et al., 2011; Lomas, Hefferon & Ivztan, 2014). Another important attribute of the Positive Communication Intervention program is that they maintain cultural and ethical consideration (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000). Therefore, as evidenced by the participants’ post-test reflections, the utilization of these positive interventions played a substantial role in the effectiveness of the Positive Communication Intervention Program on interpersonal and intergroup relations.

Another critical factor that may have aided the Positive Communication Intervention program's effectiveness is supplementing the training program with visual communication (pictures and videos), as they are more attention-grabbing and engaging delivery modalities. For example, the famous “*Young Woman or Old Woman*” optical illusion image was displayed to help the participants consider the point of view of another person and improve perspective-taking skill. They realized that our truths are strongly influenced by our point of view as a result of this exercise, and that we should be humble

while interacting with people who hold opposing viewpoints. “*Validation*” – a short film on a free compliment – was also displayed with the aim of showing the participants practical scenarios in which positive interpersonal communication affects people’s relationships. Despite its short length, the film has provided great takeaways on how powerful kind words are in positively affecting interpersonal interaction. In addition, such short videos as “The Empathy Gap” and “The Power of Forgiveness” were also displayed to stimulate and boost the intergroup relationships of the participants. These might have helped to enhance the motivation of the participants to actively engage in the intergroup dialogues and other activities which have in turn improved their relational interactions.

The creation of a gratifying communication climate might have also played a valuable role in the efficacy of the treatment program in improving the participant’s interpersonal and intergroup relationships. A friendly approach was used when conducting the training sessions to create a conducive atmosphere for the participants. The flexibility of using mother tongue during conversation, culturally relevant new activities, humble treatment, and promoting female participants’ engagement may have contributed to the intervention program’s effective implementation. Apart from the moral treatment the participants received, small material incentives (such as refreshments, certificates, prepaid calling cards, and stationery) offered during the training may have had a positive influence on the participants’ engagement and behaviour.

5.1.2. The Effectiveness of the Positive Communication Intervention Program on intergroup relationships

The results of the current study showed that the Positive Communication Intervention program was effective in bettering the intergroup relationships of the participants. In the same way that positive communication was effective in the participants’ interpersonal relationships, the within-group and between-group contrast results revealed that it was also effective in their intergroup connections. The eight-session positive communication intervention program contributed to the improvement of the participants’ intergroup relationships compared to the non-treatment control program. Their participation in the intervention program has led to a significant change in their level of intergroup relations, as the group reported higher scores in the post-test ($M=52.88$) compared to their scores in the pre-test (47.29), which is statistically significant ($t(95) = 3.79, P = .004$).

The present study's findings support the idea that intergroup contact (an essential form of positive communication) has an imperative role to play in anxiety and prejudice reduction among the outgroups. Similarly, it underpins the vital role positive communication has in the enhancement of intergroup relationships confirming the findings of prior studies which reported that positive communication, in its various forms, was positively linked to intergroup relationships. Specifically, as an element of positive communication, intergroup contact depicted improvement in intergroup relations (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Adamu, 2013; Christ, et al. 2014), and intergroup dialogues were found to promote meaningful engagement between different outgroups (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003).

Consistent with Contact Hypothesis and social exchange theory, this study discovered that pleasant contact and positive reinforcement lessen prejudice and improve intergroup relations. The outcomes of the present research are also backed up by empirical research that demonstrates that positive intergroup contact, as an important aspect of the communication process, can help people connect more effectively and reduce prejudice and anxiety (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Harwood, 2018; Ramasubramanian & Costantini, 2020). Furthermore, it coincides with the research outcome of Tropp, Uluğ & Uysal (2021) that found that intergroup contact, by way of communication intermediary, has motivated the willingness of outgroup members to engage in collective action.

The effectiveness of the Positive Communication Intervention program in enhancing intergroup interactions could be ascribed to a number of variables. The activities used during the PCIP sessions could be one of the explanations. The uplifting messages and inspirations given to the participants during the sessions may have also contributed to the program's effectiveness. During the initial stage of the sessions, particularly in the pretest assessment, a few participants felt uneasy and were hesitant to provide some demographic characteristics such as ethnicity and religion. They offered the same information openly and readily after getting to know each other and building trust. For instance, there were some participants who filled the questionnaire at the pre-test as “Ethiopian”, “prefer not to mention” or gave incorrect data when asked about their ethnicity and religion, probably attributed to the current relational situation in Ethiopia, yet they have corrected it during the post-test assessments. What is more, the sentiment of perceiving ethnic and religious-based talk as a threatening and sensitive topic is halted gradually. Thus, the intergroup contact activities and the encouragement made during the

training sessions might have helped to lessen the denigrative impediment among the groups.

Communication games (e.g., trust-building exercises) might have also contributed to the efficacy of the program. In the current Ethiopian context, the interethnic and interfaith communication climate is mostly filled with derogatory discourses, especially within the uncontrolled and exponentially expanded digital sphere (social media) where some members of outgroups have a prejudice toward one another. Humorous *communication games/exercises* were used to enhance the contact and understanding among the outgroup members, and they were seemingly successful. Some participants who were feeling uncomfortable with sharing some demographics in the pre-test assessment were willing to share the same freely after taking the treatment. Thus, the trust-building exercises and the other communication games might have played a significant role in bridging the gap.

The other factor that might have contributed to the effectiveness of the positive communication intervention is the intergroup dialogue. Intergroup dialogue has been proved to have outcomes such as resolving conflicts, improving relationships, and initiating social justice work (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). In the current Ethiopian context, irrespective of the worryingly intensifying conflicts and tensions, people fail to get along with and properly communicate with each other. Consequently, various triggering factors such as politically motivated ethnic and religious-based social media hate speeches, graffiti vandals, and biased historical narratives coupled with media manipulation are putting their relationships at the risk of deterioration. Considering its promising nature in promoting positive relationships and relieving tensions, intergroup dialogue was convened among the PCIP participants; thus an inspiring outcome was observed. Through dialogic communication, positive contact, trust, mutual understanding, and intimacy were established among the member of the out-group. Accordingly, it has facilitated the potency of the program.

Last but not least, the difficult situations instigated by the intergroup tensions and conflicts in Ethiopia may have induced the participants to seek resolution mechanisms. As the tensions both in higher education institutions and outside were worsening from time to time in Ethiopia before and during the time of data collection for the present study, the circumstance was calling for remedial interventions, and the Positive Communication Intervention program might be a prompt response for the call. Thus, the participants'

longing for such positive interventions might have a facilitating role in the effectiveness of the program.

To recapitulate, the positive communication intervention program improved participants' interpersonal and intergroup connections significantly, however the treatment program's influence on intergroup relationships was relatively less effective than its impact on interpersonal relationships, as previously indicated. Less effectiveness of intergroup relationships among Ethiopian university students might partially be attributed to fear of the unknown, historical wounds and political ideology differences (Missaye, 2013), political ideology and ethnocentrism (Melkamu and Ameyu, 2013), prejudice, stereotypes ethnocentrism and language difference (Adamu, 2013). Other factors could include the influence of country's current intercommunal confrontations, which are exacerbated by manipulated and polarized intergroup communication in the media (both online and offline) (Chekol, Moges, & Nigatu, 2021; Gullilat, 2006; Abera, 2010). Apparently, the devastating group hatred, overly strong ethnocentrism, and intolerance in everyday conversations, which might be rooted in the ethnopolitical, and/or religious bases, can prevent people from communicating and create barriers to intergroup communication (Chen, 2010; Mekonnen, 2013; Awol, 2018). This could indicate that the issue of intergroup relations should be treated with vigilance.

5.2. Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of the present study was to test the efficacy of Positive Communication on interpersonal and intergroup relationships. The findings of the study indicated that Positive Communication program enhanced positive interpersonal and intergroup relationships. The theoretical implication of this study is that Positive Communication Program is a promising and effective method for promoting positive interpersonal and intergroup relationships. These findings have important implications for our comprehension of the paradigm of good communication's potential to boost interpersonal and intergroup relations and buffer problematic interpersonal and intergroup interactions. Achieving enhanced interpersonal and intergroup relationships as a result of the positive communication intervention program might be a promising asset for future research in the field of positive communication.

The outcomes of this study support the use of verified positive communication activities/techniques that, when used consistently and routinely, can help to foster happy

relationships. Regular practice of these behaviours might facilitate intergroup contact, one of the most effective tools for fostering intergroup relationships and reducing intergroup tensions and conflicts even in the situations of violent conflict and amid the global pandemics (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Mirivel, 2012; Cissna, 1975). Specifically, these findings suggest that an all-inclusive campus-based Positive Communication Intervention program, supported by visual aids and verified positive communication techniques, and designed on a combined intergroup and individual approach, could promote positive interpersonal and intergroup relationships.

Likewise, exposure and contact among members of diverse groups in higher education institutions is thought to foster healthy interpersonal and intergroup interactions and reduce ethnocentrism (Eller & Abrams, 2004). Organizing diversity-related curricular and extracurricular events and activities like courses, forums, seminars, dialogues, training, and discussions can help to foster positive intergroup relations on campus. Exposure to such programs may encourage students to engage and form cross-ethnic friendships and a sense of equality (Adamu, 2013), as well as foster their understanding of bias and cultural and interethnic disputes (Phinney 1996). As a result, universities should develop, execute, and monitor such initiatives, as well as include them into their basic policies. The positive communication intervention program developed for this study might serve as a springboard for the integration of positive communication into a variety of related courses, curricula, and policies, as well as the use of experimental interventions by future researchers. Similarly, conflict resolution practitioners may consider evaluating and incorporating positive communication as a conflict resolution method.

As uncontrolled and destructive interpersonal and intergroup communication could be a potential cause of intergroup and interpersonal anxiety, conflict, and tensions, pursuing positive and facilitative communication might help to renovate the deteriorating relationships and heal the conflicts. Thus, higher education institutions are recommended to establish intergroup dialogue [centers], where students of different social backgrounds are provided with opportunities to develop comfort with and skill for discourse about contentious issues, especially those associated with issues of transcending differences, promoting diversity, and social justice, thereby fostering positive, meaningful, and sustained cross-group relationships. Also, teachers may assist students grow as good communicators by modeling the positive communication habits mentioned in this study.

They can also facilitate their own and their students' personal communicative transformation by modeling these behaviours (Boden & Kippers, 2012).

In addition, as intergroup conflicts have been intensified as result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has unveiled long-standing imbalances in race and ethnicity around the world (see, e.g., Oppel et al., 2020; Benitez, et al., 2020; CDC, 2020), this study underscores that the way outgroup members interact with ingroup members and communicate about intergroup variations bears importance for their readiness to actively challenge existing societal inequalities. Thus, to better understand the nature and dynamics of intergroup communication between members of outgroups, as well as to evaluate tactics that may generate meaningful intergroup contacts, further research is needed. Besides, future research should look at the impacts of positive communication and how it can be generalized to a variety of interactive social outcomes and intergroup contact.

What is more, evidence shows that media played a significant role in the escalation of intergroup conflicts in Ethiopia. One of the main triggering factors for the intensification of the ethnic and religious-based intercommunal hostility is the politically motivated derogatory discourses and hate speeches circulating over social media and corrupted manipulation of the mainstream media (Abera, 2018; Belay, 2019; Ebenezer, 2018; Chekol, Moges, & Nigatu, 2021). However, unlike direct interpersonal contact, little is known about mediated messages featuring the outgroup (Dunne, 2013; Ramasubramanian, 2013). Thus, examining the effectiveness of positive communication on the interpersonal and intergroup relationships in the digital landscape may provide a different insight. Therefore, future researchers may consider exploring the effectiveness of positive communication in augmenting the mediated interpersonal and intergroup relationships and alleviating the mediated intergroup tensions. They may also consider scrutinizing the intersections and interactions between mediated and live interaction experiences of intergroup communication and how these experiences are influenced by positive communication.

Finally, though the empirical evidence revealed that intergroup conflicts have an overwhelmingly negative impact, concerned bodies are slowing down in taking action to solve the problem (Teshome, 2018). This underlines the necessity of facilitating healthy intergroup contact, as the nature of intergroup relations can have far-reaching ramifications and impacts (either positive or negative, e.g., the unprecedented Ethiopian

IDPs caused by interactive intergroup conflicts). The outcomes of this study recommend that academicians, university administration, higher education policymakers, and the government (e.g., the ministry of peace) become aware of the situation and respond quickly. The study's findings can also be used to support contemporary initiatives aimed at fostering national dialogue-based peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia. As a result, public spheres (online and offline) should receive a lot of attention, and tremendous efforts should be made to promote positive relationships at the individual, group, institutional, and national levels through positive communication.

5.3. Conclusions

This study examined the effects of positive communication in enhancing the interpersonal and intergroup relationships of Ethiopian university students. The results show that the positive communication program brought about greater changes in the students' interpersonal and intergroup relationships when compared to the students in the control group who received no treatment. Based on the findings of the study, it is possible to conclude that Positive communication is effective in transforming interpersonal and intergroup relationships and resolving difficulties associated to such connections (e.g., conflicts, anxiety, prejudice, and ethnocentrism). The findings also revealed that positive communication had a greater impact on the participants' interpersonal connections than on intergroup relationships, implying that there is still a need to investigate intergroup communication and theorizing in the instructional setting.

Intergroup (particularly ethnicity and religion) related topics/problems are least treated/researched in Ethiopia, especially in higher education institutions, due to their sensitivity and fear of uncontrollable consequences. As a result, in Ethiopian universities, group-based intervention programs or research are less common. In this regard, the current study makes a substantial contribution to the treatment of current intergroup interactive conflicts and the transformation of positive interpersonal and intergroup relationships among university students. It may also add value to the existing scant literature as it provides empirical evidence on the application of positive communication to manage interpersonal and intergroup conflicts and boost positive relationships in the context of Ethiopian university students. Achieving enhanced interpersonal and intergroup relationships as a result of the positive communication intervention program,

irrespective of the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and intergroup conflicts might be a promising asset for future research in the field of positive communication.

One of the primary benefits of the current study was the adoption of verified and validated positive interventions or techniques into the designed positive communication intervention program. These empirically validated positive intervention techniques adapted from the distinguished framework of Character Strengths and Virtues developed by the two pioneering positive psychology scholars (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) were designated primarily owing to their excellent ethical and cultural considerations (which are universal in nature). This would apparently lay the foundation for the integration of positive communication into various related courses, curricula, policies, or interpersonal communication mainstream in the future.

The model of positive communication was utilized for testing the efficacy of positive communication on interpersonal & intergroup relationships. The intervention program was also designed based on this model so as to create opportunities for the participants to capacitate them with the required skills. Using this heuristic framework might have contributed to the effectiveness of the experiment and this could be considered one of the strengths of the study. Similarly, the designed intervention program might be a springboard/foundation for the integration of positive communication into various related courses, curricula, policies, or interpersonal communication mainstream in the future.

Overall, the findings of the study revealed that positive communication is effective in augmenting the relationship between Ethiopian university students both at individual and group levels. Thus, the study suggests the applicability of the Positive Communication Intervention Program to promoting interpersonal and intergroup relationships as well as reducing ethnic-based conflicts, tensions, and misperceptions among the members of the outgroups. It is hoped that these efforts will contribute to a better and richer understanding of the complex relationship between positive communication and relational processes.

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LISTS OF APPENDICES

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APPX-1: Research Ethics Clearance Certificate from Anadolu University

Evrak Kayıt Tarihi: 17.12.2020

Protokol No: 73155

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ANADOLU ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL VE BEŞERÎ BİLİMLER BİLİMSEL ARAŞTIRMA VE YAYIN ETİĞİ KURULU
KARAR BELGESİ

ÇALIŞMANIN TÜRÜ:	Doktora Tez Çalışması
KONU:	Sosyal Bilimleri
BAŞLIK:	Pozitif İletişimin Etiyopyalı Öğrencilerin Kişilerarası İlişkisi Üzerine Etkileri: Jigjiga Üniversitesi Örneği The Effects of Positive Communication on Ethiopian Students' Interpersonal Relationship: The Case of Jigjiga University
PROJE/TEZ YÜRÜTÜCÜSÜ:	Prof. Dr. Murat ATAİZİ
TEZ YAZARI:	Abdulatif Hajjismael AHMED
ALT KOMİSYON GÖRÜŞÜ:	-
KARAR:	Oylumlu
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Prof.Dr. Handan DEVECİ (Eğitim Fak.)	Prof.Dr. Oktay Cem ADIGÜZEL (Eğitim Fak.)

APPX-2: Participants' Consent Form

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this study is to assess the level of your interpersonal and intergroup relationships. It involves questions that have potential to address your feeling about your friendship maintenance, intergroup contact, and intergroup anxiety. The data you provide will be used only for research purpose and will be kept confidential. Your honest responses will have an enormous contribution for knowledge production. Based on these conditions, if you are willing to participate in this survey, please indicate your volunteerism by filling the “*Participant's Consent Form*” below. Thanks for your time and contribution.

Participant's Informed Consent Form

This study titled “The Effects of Positive Communication on the Interpersonal and Intergroup Relationships of Ethiopian Students” aims to examine the effectiveness of the Positive Communication program in improving the interpersonal relations of students in Ethiopian universities. Employing a pre-test-post-test control group design, the study is conducted by Abdulatif Hajjismael AHMED under supervision of Prof. Dr. Murat ATAIZI of Anadolu University. Participation in the study must be on a voluntary basis. No personal identification information is required in the questionnaire. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and evaluated only by the researcher; the obtained data will be used for scientific purposes.

The questionnaire does not contain questions that may cause discomfort in the participants. However, during participation, for any reason, if you feel uncomfortable, you are free to quit at any time. In such a case, it will be sufficient to tell the person conducting the survey (i.e., data collector) that you haven't completed the questionnaire. We would like to thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

I am participating in this study totally on my own will and I give my consent for the use of the information I provide for scientific purposes.

Name & Surname: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPX-3: Demographic Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

The purpose of this study is to assess the level of your interpersonal and intergroup relationships. It involves questions that have potential to address your feeling about your friendship maintenance, intergroup contact, and intergroup anxiety. The data you provide will be used only for research purpose and will be kept confidential. Your honest responses will have an enormous contribution for knowledge production. Thanks for your time and contribution.

Direction:

Please complete the following questions regarding your personal biographic and demographic details. The data you provide will be used exclusively for research purpose and will be kept confidential. Please write your answer or put “ ✓ ” in the box which corresponds your best answer.

Please type the initial letters of your name and your last name (e.g., if your name is John Smith, only type JS): _____

1. Your gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
2. Your age: _____
3. Your ethnicity: _____
4. Your religion: _____
5. Your department: _____
6. Year of stay in university: _____

APPX-4: Friendship Maintenance Scale

Direction:

As you respond to the following statements, please rate each question on HOW OFTEN YOU & YOUR FRIEND do engage in each behaviour in your friendship using the linear scale with 7-points (1 = never, 7 = frequently). In this scale, a friend is defined as someone with whom you are/were close or best friend but not a romantic partner or a relative.

s/n	Item							
	How often do you and your friend ...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Express thanks when one friend does something nice for the other?							
2	Try to make each other laugh?							
3	Not return each other's messages?							
4	Try to be upbeat and cheerful when together?							
5	Reminisce about things you did together in the past?							
6	Try to make the other person "fee good" about who they are?							
7	Let each other know you accept them for who they are?							
8	Support each other when one of you is going through a difficult time?							
9	Let each other know you want the relationship to last in the future?							
10	Provide each other with emotional support?							
11	Share your private thoughts with each other?							
12	Repair misunderstandings?							
13	Give advice to each other?							
14	Show signs of affection toward each other?							
15	Have intellectually stimulating conversations?							
16	Do favors for each other?							
17	Visit each other's homes?							
18	Make an effort to spend time together even when you are busy?							
19	Celebrate special occasions together?							
20	Work together on jobs or tasks?							

APPX-5: General Intergroup Contact Quantity and contact Quality Scale

Direction:

Answer all questions with reference to the typical everyday contact with people of different ethnicity or religion (referred here as those of the ‘outgroup’) and what you personally think about the out-group, based on your real personal experiences. Please indicate your responses using the linear scale with 7-points (1 = not at all, 7 = a great deal).

s/n	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	How much contact do you have with outgroup at college?							
2	How much contact do you have with outgroup as neighbours?							
3	How much contact do you have with outgroup close friends?							
4	How often have you engaged in informal conversations with outgroup members?							
5	How often have you visited the homes of the outgroup members?							
6	To what extent did you experience the contact with the outgroup as equal?							
7	To what extent did you experience the contact with the outgroup as involuntary or voluntary?							
8	To what extent did you experience the contact with the outgroup as superficial or intimate?							
9	To what extent did you experience the contact with the outgroup as pleasant?							
10	To what extent did you experience the contact with the outgroup as competitive or cooperative?							

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education and Work Experiences

- 2016 – 2022 / Doctoral / Communication Design and Management, Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Turkey
- 2009 – 2011 / Masters / Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL), Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia
- 2005 – 2008 / Bachelor / English Language and Literature, University of Gondar, Ethiopia
- 2008 - 2016 / Lecturer, Chairperson/ Department of English Language and Literature at Jigjiga University, Ethiopia
- 2013 - 2016 / Deputy Dean in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jigjiga University, Jigjiga / Ethiopia
- 2014- 2015/ Leader of Higher Diploma Program (HDP) / Jigjiga University, Jigjiga / Ethiopia
- 2013 – 2016: Academic staff discipline committee chairperson in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities at Jigjiga University
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Publications

- Elemo, A. S., Ahmed, A. H., Kara, E., & Zerkeshi, M. K. (2021). The Fear of COVID-19 and flourishing: assessing the mediating role of sense of control in international students. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-021-00522-1>
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