

Original Article

Creating favorable emotional climates in university volleyball teams

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Abstract

The aim of this article was to study the influence of various techniques, training games and exercises that allow overcoming emotional barriers and improve interaction within student volleyball teams. 30 students from two volleyball teams (male and female) of the South Ural State University participated in the study. For the creation of favourable emotional climate in teams we assessed emotional control ability; excessive emotionality; inflexible and underdeveloped emotionality; dominance of negative emotions; and unwillingness to make friends using the emotional toolkit.

The study demonstrated that training games and exercises three times a week before training improve significantly emotional contacts between players and contribute to the effectiveness of teamwork.

Keywords: *interpersonal communication, emotional barriers in communication, student teams.*

Introduction.

Every human activity is largely driven by interpersonal communication (Semenyuk, 1996, Cherepov et al, 2017), the same is for sports, where the quality and success of performance directly depend on the players' communication efficiency during trainings and competitions (Totterdell, 2000, Campo et al, 2012).

Even individual sport disciplines imply interpersonal communication between competitors based on certain rules. Team sports are even more sensitive to the quality and principles of communication, which are pivotal for teamwork, team spirit and successful performance in competitions (Fadina, 2011, Goldenberg et al, 2014).

Practical experience shows that players' communicative inability or inefficacy result in many conflicts and disagreements in team sports (Lazarus, 2000). Communication barriers are always associated with such negative emotions like shame, guilt, fear, anxiety, inferiority complex, etc. Mudrik (2011) writes that negative emotions may be ranked among key psychological barriers for communication. Examples of such emotions are:

- Distress and grief;
- Strong irritation and anger;
- Fear, shame, guilt; and
- Bad mood caused by physical and/or emotional factors.

Objective of the study was to estimate the emotional barriers for communication in the sport teams of the South Ural State University.

Methods and structure of the study.

The study was performed in the period from September to December 2016 at the South Ural State University (National Research University), Chelyabinsk, Russia. The study involved 30 players aged 18-23 from two (female and male) volleyball teams of the South Ural State University. The subjects were surveyed using the Boyko's Emotional Barriers in Interpersonal Communication questionnaire (Fetiskin et al, 2005).

We estimated the participants using the following criteria: emotional control ability; excessive emotionality; inflexible and underdeveloped emotionality; dominance of negative emotions; and unwillingness to make friends using the emotional toolkit.

To help the players overcome interpersonal emotional barriers, we developed a communication skills improvement training model including role games and special exercises to develop communication control skills (Friesen et al, 2013, Kipnis, 2014). In role games, the players were encouraged to report and analyse their own (and teammates') actions, feelings, thoughts and sensations to better understand the behavioural models of surrounding people.

Training sessions were designed on the following principles:

1. Universality, with training games applicable to any group of trainees.
2. Teamwork, with the games and exercises intended to consolidate members of the group/team.
3. Effective training management, with the games, exercises and tasks created to stimulate teamwork and facilitate interactive learning process.

4. Modularity, with tasks and games, which can be used in any combinations.

5. Integrity of the training system, without giving special preference to any psychological technique/method.

10-15-minute training sessions were scheduled three times a week prior to regular training practices. The communicative training cycle lasted three months. Table 1 demonstrates the example of training games and exercises.

Table 1. *Training games and exercises for communication skills development*

Name	Goals
Asian marketplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help players to get acquainted and bridge communication gaps; - Reduce natural tension due to the active involvement in the role game “here and now”; and - Raise interest of participants in one another via competitive partnership.
Ten seconds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribute to overcoming anxiety in participants; - Help players bridge communication gaps; and - Improve team spirit.
Stone on the road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop focus on a partner; and - Encourage common emotional experience connected with team tasks.
Speech chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train the ability to listen and understand; - Train the ability to concentrate on a partner; and - Train memory.
Three touches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train creativity and the speed of data processing; - Consolidate a team with the help of permanent active teamwork; - Facilitate the development of communication skills with the help of effective teamwork; and - Provide various interpersonal contacts within a team.
Physical relay race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ease tension in a team by active involvement in collective physical efforts; - Encourage partnership building process; - Encourage body language application for communication; - Facilitate physical relaxation of players; and - Develop the ability to concentrate on a partner.
Emotional relay race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop gestures, mimics and body language to improve the efficiency of non-verbal communication and emotional contacts; and - Encourage the efforts to create a friendly climate and focus on a partner.
Friendly parody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish feedback related to non-verbal communication tools; - Develop gestures, mimics and body language to improve the communication efficiency; and - Contribute to the creation of friendly atmosphere.
What’s next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish the climate of emotional freedom, openness, friendship and trust in a group; and - Help participants to bridge communication gaps.

Study results and discussion. Prior to the experiment, the subjects were tested for emotional barriers in interpersonal communication. The data obtained revealed that only 13.3% of the subjects had relatively low emotional barriers, while about a half of the volleyball players of both genders demonstrated emotional barriers for communication, creating obstacles for their contacts with other people: see Figure 1.

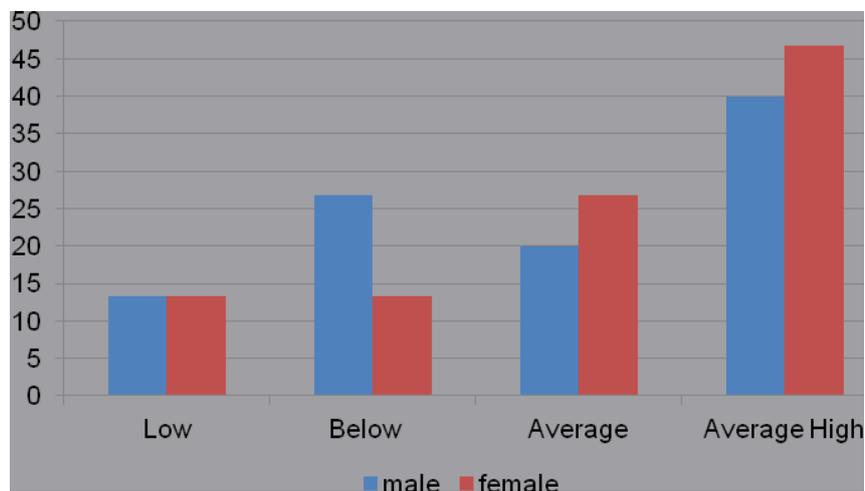


Figure 1. *Classification of the subjects by the levels of emotional barriers prior to the experiment, %*

Furthermore, 50% and 40% of female and male subjects, respectively, failed to control and manage their emotions, complicating their relationship with teammates. 70% and 40% of female and male subjects, respectively, tended to express inadequately their emotions; and 50% of the volleyball players of both genders demonstrated underdevelopment, inexpressiveness and stiffness of emotional manifestations. Negative emotions dominated in 30% and 20% of female and male subjects, respectively, and these participants faced difficulties in contacts with other people. Furthermore, 70% and 20% of female and male subjects, respectively, revealed unwillingness to contact with people: see Figure 2.

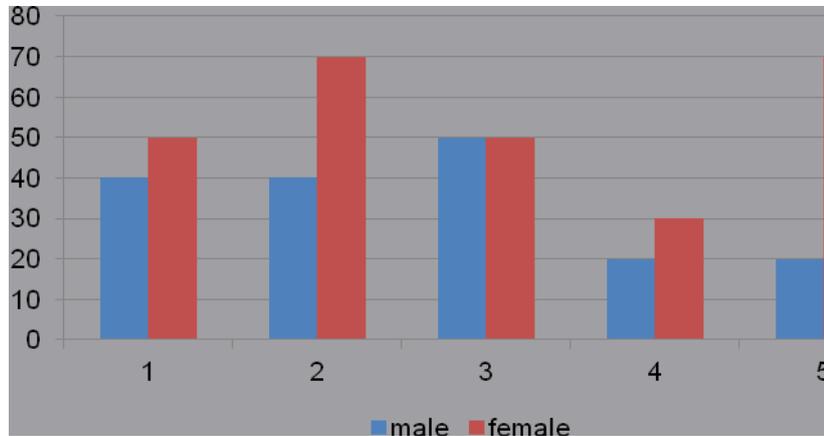


Figure 2. *Emotional profile of the subjects prior to the experiment, %*
 1 – inability to control emotions; 2 – inadequate control of emotions; 3 – emotional underdevelopment, inexpressiveness and stiffness; 4 – dominance of negative emotions; 5 –unwillingness to establish contacts

These observations are supported by other researchers. For instance, Yakobson, 1998, notes that adolescents demonstrate high emotional sensitivity to a variety of factors. Friesen, 2013, states that this age group usually lives a turbulent life full of serious emotional and behavioural problems and conflicts with both surrounding people and themselves. An acute need for communication forces them to look for a listener to share the most critical problems with, and this need is more pronounced in women. The understanding may not necessarily be rational as they rather expect emotional contacts and empathy. Upon completion of the training, we performed the second test: see Figure 3.

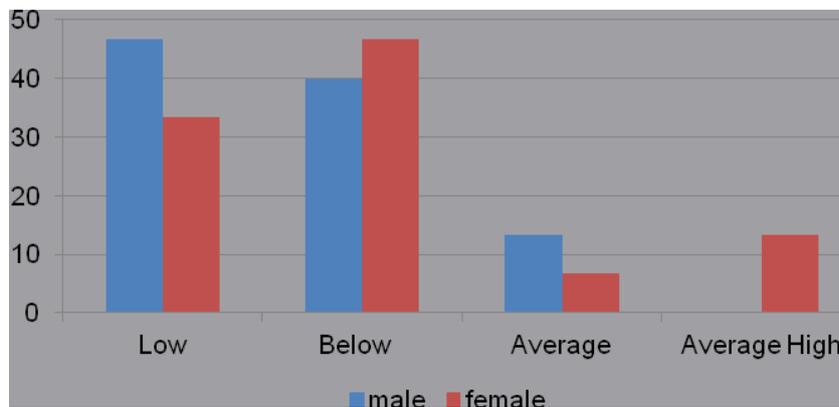


Figure 3. *Classification of the subjects by the levels of emotional barriers after the experiment, %*
 The diagram shows that the number of participants with low emotional barriers grew up to 33.3% and 46.7% in female and male subjects, respectively, while the number of subjects with high barriers decreased significantly: see Figure 3.

The results of competitions demonstrate the improvement of teamwork in the participants studied. We took into account only top-rank competitions. Thus, the male team won the first prize in Cup-R-Sport Volleyball Tournament during the III International Festival of Student and Youth Sport “Moscow Games 2016”. In addition, both male and female teams won prizes in 2016 University Games of the Chelyabinsk region.

Conclusion.

Ten-fifteen-minute training games and exercises aimed at removing emotional barriers in communication have a positive impact on players, reduce "obstacles" for emotional contacts, improve emotional climate, and increase team performance.

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