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Research Article

Operationalizing Employability: A Framework for Evaluating Non-Verbal Communication in Professional Readiness

Ankit Kumar Sharma[1] and Dr. Pankhuri Agarwal[2]

[1]Research Scholar, Teerthanker Mahaveer University, Moradabad (U.P.) India

[2]Associate Professor, Teerthanker Mahaveer University, Moradabad (U.P.) India

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***Corresponding author: Ankit Kumar Sharma**

Abstract: Employability is increasingly understood as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond technical knowledge and cognitive abilities to include behavioral and communicative competencies essential for professional readiness. Among these competencies, non-verbal communication plays a critical role in shaping workplace interactions, professional perceptions, and overall employability outcomes, yet it remains inadequately operationalized within existing assessment models. The objective of this paper is to develop a structured framework for the assessment of non-verbal communication as a key component of professional readiness. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature from employability studies, communication theory, and organizational behaviour, the study identifies core non-verbal dimensions—including body language, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, professional appearance, and paralinguistic cues—and translates them into clearly defined, assessable indicators. The proposed framework offers a systematic approach to evaluating non-verbal communication competencies, enabling more consistent, objective, and holistic employability assessments. By operationalizing non-verbal communication for assessment purposes, this paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of employability and provides practical implications for educators, trainers, recruiters, and policymakers focused on enhancing professional readiness and workforce preparedness.

Keywords: Employability; Non-Verbal Communication; Professional Readiness; Communication Competencies; Employability Assessment Framework; Workforce Preparedness.

INTRODUCTION

Employability has become a construct of multidimensional nature and has come to be considered beyond the academic qualification and technical skills. In the modern labor markets, employers increasingly attach more importance to behavioral, interpersonal, and communicative skills that allow people to work effectively in the professional setting. Consequently, professional preparedness ceased to be determined by knowledge acquisition only but rather by the capability to exhibit flexible and socially fit workplace conducts. Out of these competencies, communication skills have become an important factor of employability (Mahajan et al, 2022).

Although verbal communication has been a topic of significant academic research, non-verbal communication has been relatively under-researched, as far as a systematic evaluation is concerned. Body language, facial expression, posture, eye contact, and professional appearance are some of the non-verbal communications that makes or breaks the first impressions, credibility in the profession, and interactions in workplace.

Non-verbal communication has scarcely been operationalized in terms of employability evaluation despite its recognized significance. The current assessment models are usually not based on clear indicators of measuring the non-verbal competencies, which leads to subjective and inconsistent assessment. Filling this gap, the current research was to create and prove an organized structure of measuring non-verbal communication as the important constituent of professional readiness and employability (Gray, 2025).

Over the last few years, the global job environment has been changing at a very fast rate and therefore, graduates who are no longer only technically skilled but also able to prove their competence through manifestation of good professional behavior and interpersonal skills have been in high demand. Employers are out in search of those who are able to adjust to different working conditions, communicate effectively and portray professionalism during both formal and informal contacts Shi and Wang (2025). As a result of this, employability has become a dynamic construct which combines cognitive, technical, and behavioral competencies in terms of the increased complexity of the modern professional roles. In this changing environment, the communication skills have become a key element of employability. Verbal communication has always been the focus of the educational and training programs but non-verbal communication turned out to be a factor of professional success that is as powerful as verbal communication. Body language, including body posture, facial expression, eye contact, and appearance deduces much more attitudes,

confidence, and credibility than verbal statements. These cues play a big role in controlling first impressions in the interview process, interpersonal work relations and competence and professionalism perceptions.

Nonverbal communication has not been sufficiently incorporated into the employability assessment models although it has been recognized as an important element. The current models tend to assume non-verbal behaviours informally or evaluate them implicitly, therefore, resulting into subjective analyses and inconsistent results. Non-verbal communication lacks common measures, so educators, recruiters, and trainers cannot assess professional preparedness in a systematic way. This omission brings out the necessity of a structured and operationalised framework that can be able to turn non-verbal communication behaviours into measurable and assessable elements (Jones, 2021).

In addition, the increased focus on experiential learning, competency based-training and outcome-driven training has further solidified the need to align the employability assessment with the practical professional expectations. When students and young career workers leave the classroom or the academic setting and move to the work place, the skills of their depiction of proper non-verbal communication becomes vital to their employability and further career development. In this awareness, the current research was aimed at constructing a holistic framework on assessing non-verbal communication competencies; thus, helping to make more holistic, objective and practice-based employability assessment (Bandaranaike, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Siddique et al. (2022) proposed a new sociotechnical competency method. Courses emphasized PM-specific technical skills. Personal Competencies were important in PM courses, according to recent studies. Effective project management (PM) education develops leadership skills. The study aims to improve insight and competence. The study used quantitative methods for exploratory and educational action research. The first of four phases of the study used an action-based approach to assess Personal Competence PM Students' needs. The Author follow up with research participants to ensure they have PM personal competency knowledge. Another study found research subjects lack communication abilities. The final stage includes competency assessment exams, evaluation tools, training and trainer feedback tools, and a competency-based training plan. The study impacts PM curricula and competencies. Topical relevance equips students for work. **Wu & Philbin (2023)** added that in the digital age and Industry 4.0, engineering students' communication skills were restricting their job prospects. The study used the four key concepts of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) to explore how engineering students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills improve their employability. Survey participants included 130 college students and engineering professionals. The Author investigated hypotheses using structural equation modeling and regression. Research indicates that verbal ($p < 0.01$) and non-verbal ($p < 0.001$) communication abilities greatly impact engineering students' digital employment prospects. Teachers can use business employability examinations to improve student communication. The study improved engineering students' theoretical and digital training skills, making them more employable.

Curtwas & McKenzie (2002) assessed industry "employability skills" in 2001, funded by DEST and ANAT. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia ended the project in March 2002. For the initiative, employability skills included "flourish inside a company so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to corporate strategic directions," not only getting a job. The Mayer key skills project was commissioned to develop (a) guidance on potential new generic employability competencies that industry wants or will want soon, (b) precise descriptions of what Australian businesses and industries mean by employability skills, and (c) a suggested set of tools for rating and reporting these abilities. The industry's perception of the proposed suite and reporting choices was examined through case studies of major enterprises and focus groups with SMEs. The report examined Australian and international employability skill studies and policy. Discussion of Australian education and training's employability skills improvement methods, concepts, aims, and fieldwork framework. SOL transformed student instruction, according to **Lukashe et al. (2024).** Their effectiveness in teaching student's computer use, group communication, and real-world experience was unknown. The study examined how SOL affects students' basic skills and workforce readiness. 27 third- and fourth-year South African university students were interviewed in-depth. Participants come from diverse SOL and professional skill development backgrounds. Thematic analyses discovered interview themes and ideas. SOLs improve students' technology skills and digital adaptability for a digital workforce. Practical experience and interpersonal skills were lacking in SOL. The lack of networking activities and their unpreparedness for jobs that need people skills and work experience frustrated students. The study stresses practical learning and soft skills to combine digital learning with robust skill development.

Objective of the Study

1) To identify the key dimension of non- verbal communication that contribute to professional readiness and employability
2) To examine the relationship between non – verbal communication competencies and perceived employability outcomes among individuals preparing for professional roles.

3) To develop and operationalize a structured framework for assessing non- verbal communication skill in employability evaluation.

4) To analyse the relevance of non – verbal communication assessment for educators, recruiters, and trainers in enhancing professional readiness.

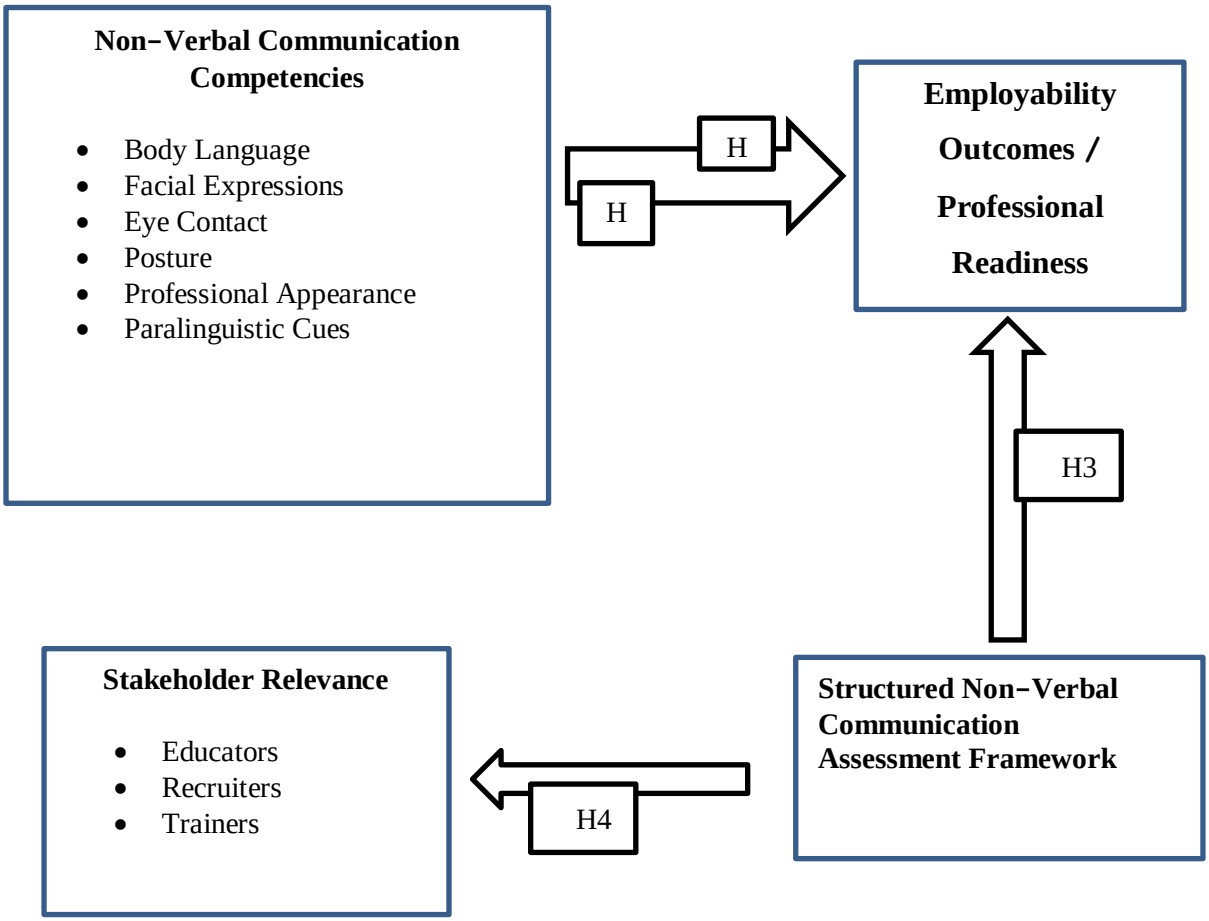

Figure 1: Research Model Showing the Impact of Non-Verbal Communication Competencies on Employability Outcomes

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed study employs a descriptive and analytical research strategy to examine the role of non – verbal communication in professional readiness and employability. The 250 respondents were selected the study drawn upon both primary and secondary data sources. Secondary data are collected from academic journals employability studies, communication theory, and organizational behaviour study to establish the conceptual foundation of the study. Primary data are gathered using structured questionnaire designed to assess key non-verbal communication dimension such as body language, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, professional appearance, and paralinguistic cues. The target population consists of students and early- career professional preparing for employment. A convenience sampling method is employed to select respondents. The collected data are analysed descriptive statistics and inferential techniques, including correlation and regression analysis to examine the relationship between non – verbal communication competencies and employability outcomes.

Results based on hypothesis

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents (N= 250)

Variable	Category	N	(%)
Age	Below 25	78	31.2
	25–34	69	27.6
	35–44	56	22.4
	45 and above	47	18.8
Gender	Male	112	44.8
	Female	128	51.2
	Other	10	4.0
	Student	98	39.2

Occupation	Salaried	72	28.8
	Self-employed/Business	36	14.4
	Professional	44	17.6
Education Level	Undergraduate	86	34.4
	Postgraduate	121	48.4
	Doctoral/Professional	43	17.2
Professional Experience	No experience	91	36.4
	Less than 2 years	67	26.8
	2-5 years	54	21.6
	More than 5 years	38	15.2

The demographic aspects of the respondents are given in Table 1. Most participants are falling into the category of under 25 years (31.2%), 25-34 years (27.6%), which suggests a high participation of students, as well as young people in the career. The number of female respondents (51.2) is a little higher when compared to males (44.8) so that there would be a balance between males and females. The ratio of students (39.2%) is quite large, then there are salaried workers (28.8%), which corresponds with the intentions of the study subject, i.e., the professional-preparation of individuals. The respondents are well-educated, and almost half of the sample (48.4) has postgraduate education. Generally, the demographic description proves that the sample is suitable to investigate the non-verbal communication competencies with respect to professional maturity and employability.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of Non-verbal Communication Scale

Construct	**No. of Items**	**Cronbach's Alpha**
Non-Verbal Communication Skills	18	0.891
Employability / Professional Readiness	8	0.864

The reliability analysis showed that all the constructs of the study have high internal consistency. The Non-Verbal Communication Skills scale is extremely reliable with Cronbach alpha of 0.891 and the Employability/Professional Readiness scale scores of the alpha is 0.864. These values are more than the recommended level of 0.70 and it proves that the measurement tools used in the study are trustworthy and can be further analyzed statistically.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Non-verbal Communication Dimensions

Dimension	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Body Language	3.92	0.61
Facial Expressions	3.87	0.58
Eye Contact	4.01	0.63
Posture	3.76	0.66
Professional Appearance	4.12	0.55
Paralinguistic Cues	3.84	0.6
Overall Non-Verbal Communication	3.92	0.54

Table 3 represented the standard deviation and mean of major dimensions of non-verbal communication. The most noticeable competencies are professional appearance (Mean = 4.12) and eye contact (Mean = 4.01), which implies that these two competencies are perceived as highly essential in the professional readiness. The mean scores of other dimensions, such as body language, facial expressions, posture, and paralinguistic cues, are above average, which shows that the respondents are generally in the positive self-evaluations. The general average score (3.92) indicates the high degree of non-verbal communication competence in the sample, which is rather mediocre.

H1: Non-verbal communication competencies significantly contributes to professional readiness and employability.
H01: Non-verbal communication competencies do not significantly contributes to professional readiness and employability.

Table 4: Correlations Analysis

Variables	**Pearson r**	**Sig. (p)**
Non-Verbal Communication ↔ Employability	0.681	0
Since $p < 0.05$, H1 is accepted and H01 is rejected.		

The correlation analysis showed that there is a positive strong relationship ($r = 0.681$, $p < 0.05$) between non-verbal communication competencies and employability outcomes. This implies that the greater the skills of non-verbal

communication the more professional readiness and employability. H1 is thus adopted and it proves that the non-verbal communication competencies play a significant role in determining employability.

H2: There is a significant relationship between Non-verbal communication competencies and perceived employability outcomes among individuals preparing for professionals role.

H02: There is no significant relationship between Non-verbal communication competencies and perceived employability outcomes among individuals preparing for professionals role.

Table 5: Correlation with Employability

Dimension	**Correlation with Employability (r)**	**p-value**
Body Language	0.612	$p < .001$
Facial Expressions	0.578	$p < .001$
Eye Contact	0.654	$p < .001$
Posture	0.541	$p < .001$
Professional Appearance	0.689	$p < .001$
Paralinguistic Cues	0.596	$p < .001$
All dimensions show significant positive relationships. **H2** accepted, H02 rejected.		

As indicated in table 5, there is significant positive correlation between the dimensions of non-verbal communication and perceived employability outcomes. Of these, professional appearance ($r = 0.689$) and eye contact ($r = 0.654$) show the highest levels of association. These results indicate that there is a combination of non-verbal signs that affect the perceptions of employability. Based on this, H2 is accepted whereas the null hypothesis is rejected.

H3: A structured framework for assessing non- verbal communication skills significantly enhances employability evaluation.

H03: A structured framework for assessing non- verbal communication skills does not significantly enhance employability evaluation.

Table 6: Regression Analysis

Predictor	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p**	**95% CI**
Constant	0.842	0.124	—	6.79	$p < .001$	[0.598, 1.086]
Non-Verbal Communication Assessment Framework	0.683	0.043	0.714	16.08	$p < .001$	[0.599, 0.767]

Model Fit:

- $R = 0.714$
- $R^2 = 0.510$
- $F(1, 248) = 258.42$, $p < .001$

The regression analysis showed that the structured nonverbal communication assessment framework was a significant prediction of the employability outcomes. The model has clarified 51% of the variance in the employability assessment ($R^2 = 0.510$, $F(1,248) = 258.42$, $p = .001$). The assessment framework showed that it has a high positive impact on the employability ($= 0.714$, $t = 16.08$, $p < .001$) signifying that a systematic analysis of non-verbal communication largely increases the accuracy and efficiency of the employability assessment process.

H4: Assessment of non-verbal communication skills is significantly relevant for educators, recruiters, and trainers in enhancing professional readiness.

H04: Assessment of non-verbal communication skills is not significantly relevant for educators, recruiters, and trainers in enhancing professional readiness.

Table 7: Relevance of non-verbal communication assessment for stakeholders.

Stakeholder Group	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Educators	4.21	0.52
Recruiters	4.35	0.49
Trainers	4.18	0.54
Assessment of non-verbal communication skills is highly relevant. **H4 accepted**, **H04 rejected**.		

One-Sample t-Test (Test Value = 3)
t = 24.87

P < .001

Table 7 brings to the fore the perceived relevance of non-verbal communication assessment on important stakeholders. The mean score of recruiters is highest (4.35) and then educators take the second position (4.21) and trainers (4.18). The t-test with one sample validates that these mean values are much larger than the middle point that is neutral, and this means that there is a strong consensus over the significance of non-verbal communication assessment. Therefore, the H4 hypothesis is accepted, which underlines its applicability to the improvement of professional readiness.

DISCUSSION

The current research paper addressed the importance of non-verbal communication skills in the development of professional preparedness and employability in a student and early-career professional environment. The results showed that non-verbal communication skills played a major role in perceived employability results, which supported the perspective that employability surpassed technical knowledge to embrace behavioral and communicative skills. This finding corroborated the other employability frameworks that were focusing on the holistic skill development as a core component of workforce preparedness (Coetzee, 2012). To be more exact, the research found that there is a strong positive correlation between the overall non-verbal communication competence and professional readiness. This result was in line with Cuic Tankovic, Kapeš, and Benazic (2023) that showed that communication skills were important in the perceptions of employability in particularly service-based and people-focused fields of work. Although their research was conducted in the tourism field, the current research has expanded this argument by operationalizing non-verbal communication as a quantifiable concept that can be applied to any field of professionalism.

In addition, the discussion of separate non-verbal dimensions indicated that the aspects of professional appearance, eye contact, and body language were more strongly related to the outcomes of employability compared to other cues. These results, in turn, contributed to the fact that communicative competence, which involves the use of non-verbal means of expression, served as a significant predictor of professional ability and work preparedness (Tanveer, 2023). Similarly, as Dona (2025) pointed out, experiential and behavioral attributes had a strong determinative role in the process of the development of employability, and, therefore, the visible indicator of professional confidence and adaptability was non-verbal communication. The efficiency of the designed framework suggested in this paper was also confirmed with the help of regression analysis that revealed that non-verbal communication skills were used to justify a significant fraction of the variance in terms of employability assessment.

This finding was reminiscent of Bandaranaike (2018), who stressed the shift in the academic skills development to work-related skills. The current framework bridged a gap that was found in the literature of employability assessment by converting the abstract non-verbal behaviors into measurable indicators. Besides, the findings also significantly supported the applicability of non-verbal communication assessment to educators, recruiters, and trainers. This finding was consistent with the Career and College Readiness (CCR) model suggested by Morningstar et al. (2015), according to which transferable and observable skills were highlighted as crucial in equipping individuals with professional jobs. On the same note, Jones (2021) opined that professional readiness in any other discipline largely relied on behavioral competencies that could be illustrated and tested in practice. The new empirical research also reinforced the consequences of the current results. Shi and Wang (2025) proved that the perceived employability of graduates was significantly increased with the help of structured assessment tools, including AI-based mock interviews that gave feedback on their communication and behavioral performance. Similarly, Gray Jr. (2025) indicated that the non-traditional learning conditions, such as esports, were conducive to the development of employability traits because of communication, cooperation, and professionalism.

These researches all favoured the argument that systematic evaluation of non-verbal communication was pertinent and required in current employability models. Lastly, the results were consistent with Zulmi and Tentama (2024), who also highlighted the importance of social intelligence in the development of employability. As one of the main elements of social intelligence, non-verbal communication was found to be an important factor of professional readiness. Generally, the discussion has identified that the operationalization of non-verbal communication in terms of a structured

framework offered a more holistic and viable way of evaluation in regards to employability.

CONCLUSION

The research made a conclusion that non-verbal communication was one of the key but commonly neglected aspects of professional readiness and employability. The results revealed that body language, eye contact, posture, appearance at work, and paralinguistic cues are competencies that have a significant impact on perceived outcome of employability in students and early-career professionals. Using a structured framework to evaluate non-verbal communication, the study has managed to address one of the major gaps of the current models of employability assessment that have historically focused on technical and verbal skills. The findings also confirmed that the systematic analysis of non-verbal communication promoted the objectivity and efficiency of employability assessment practices. On the whole, the research has highlighted the need to incorporate the assessment of non-verbal communication in educational training, recruitment, and professional development programs to add to a more comprehensive and practice-based concept of employability and professional readiness.

Implication of the study

The research presented valuable theoretical as well as practical implications to the research and practice of employability. The operationalization of non-verbal communication into measurable dimensions made the study help to develop a more holistic concept of professional readiness. As an educator, the results highlighted the importance of incorporating training in non-verbal communications into the curriculum and programs on employability skills development. The proposed framework might also be helpful to recruiters and trainers as it will allow them to use the standardized assessment tools to evaluate non-verbal competencies of candidates in a more objective manner. The study at a policy level endorsed the incorporation of behavioral and communicative skills in the employability benchmarks and workforce development policies.

Limitations of the study

The study had its limitations despite what it contributed to. To begin with, the study had descriptive and cross-sectional design that restricted the power to draw the causal links between non-verbal communication competencies and employability outcomes. Second, the self-reports could have led to the created response bias because the subjects could have overrated their skills in their communication. Third, the research involved mostly students and early-career professionals thus limiting the ability to generalize the results to experienced professionals or specific industries.

Recommendation for future research

The studies can be done in the future using longitudinal or experimental research design to determine how non-verbal communication competencies evolved over time and contributed to the outcomes of the real employment. The particular variations in the non-verbal communication needs and evaluation standards in the industry might also be the focus of further research. Moreover, to obtain more objective and dynamic data about non-verbal communication competence, the assessment methods based on technology, like the use of AI-driven interviews or simulation-based evaluation, could be implemented. By making the sample larger, with regard to various professional areas, as well as cultural backgrounds, the strength and transfers of future results would be even more emphasized and relevant.

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