

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND HEALTHY MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

BY

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### ABSTRACT

*In any relationship, especially that of marriage, effective communication skills are vital for the well-being of its members. In the process of communicating, problems are experienced, which evoke complaints about a partner not talking to a spouse or not listening. These shows that couples lack attending and listening skills. This study therefore, attempts to examine the efficacy of attending and listening skills in improving communication among married couples. An experimental design was chosen to gather data for the study. A sample of 120 subjects were randomly selected and assigned to experimental group (60) and control group (60). An instrument titled couples' communication skills inventory (CCSI) was administered to the subjects. T-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The result showed a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group. Based on the finding, attending and listening skills counseling on communication was recommended for marriage enrichment programme.*

### Introduction

Marriage is a relationship in which two individuals of opposite sex make emotional and legal commitment to live together. It is a social institution that fosters the formation of a family. Marriage enables spouses to care, tolerate, endure, persevere, show kindness and be responsible to each other. This is communication of affection which enables a spouse to make and keep friendship that enhances marital relationship for healthy living.

Communication is very vital in all facets of human life, especially in marital relationship. It is used to persuade, encourage, influence, share, discover needs and show affection to partners. Hybels and Weaver (2001) stated that communication is a process in which people share information, ideas and feelings which involve not only spoken and written word but also body

language, personal mannerisms, style and anything that conveys a message. Thus, spouses need to improve their communication skills everyday to maintain and enhance their marital relationship so as to experience healthy relationship. This research study therefore, attempts to determine the level of communication effectiveness of married couples.

### Effective Communication

The marriage relationship according to Posse and Melgosa (2005) must be nurtured continually if spouses are to experience daily support that serves as an oasis in the middle of daily activities. This would be possible only when effective communication is the basic act. For spouses that communicate at all levels are strengthening the psychological and emotional ties that bind them. Ability to communicate feelings, states of mind, expectations and hopes

effectively, does not happen easily. It happens only when married couples acquire communication skills and use them effectively. It can be achieved with practice and in the framework of a peaceful atmosphere.

Deep communication involves emotional and affective effort as well as proper attending, listening and responsiveness. In an effort to maintain healthy relationship at home, married couples should endeavour to acquire and use attending and listening skills. This can occur according to Oyinloye (2007) when you communicate on a one to one basis usually in an informal, unstructured setting like in a marital relationship, which gives spouses opportunities to attend and listen. This form of communication occurs mostly between a husband and wife, which is a form of dyadic relationship. It offers spouses quality time that is spent together and serves as an investment in the relationship that would improved communication for healthy family life.

For effective attending and listening skills of communication to enhance marital relationship, spouses need to engage in sincere dialogue that is frank, open and friendly at the same time. In this type of relating, according to Posse and Melgosa (2005), the person who speaks expects that the other person will attend, listen and give the appropriate response showing his or her understanding and receptiveness. Therefore, ability to attend and listen between spouses should always be clear, direct, persuasive, and good natured. For when couples' relationship develop in a friendly atmosphere, it stimulates easy and agreeable attending and listening skills of communication. The result would be a healthy and cordial atmosphere at home where acceptance and trust can develop.

Effective communication that enhances marital relationship requires that spouses participate in conversation by attending and listening to their partners. A better way to motivate and to stimulate participatory communication is to open the doors to attending and listening in order to facilitate and enrich the relationship. In this way conversation becomes easier, interesting and is shared. It transmits love, empathy and understanding. It also develops in an atmosphere that is free from fear and anxiety and improve openness, respect and thoughtfulness. This is the form of conversation mostly used in an environment of complete trust and freedom. The absolute importance of effective communication in marital relationship is to enhance the need for acceptance, affection and love. Married couples could forge healthy relationships by attending and listening to each other so that they experience harmony at home.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The communication among married couples are ineffective that partners complained about not receiving appropriate responses that are desired. Most couples use inappropriate listening attitudes when attending to their partner's communication. For example, some couples filter messages that their partners sent. Others busy themselves doing something else while their partners talk to them. At other times, couples block or occupy their minds with other thoughts which hinder them from attentively listening to their partners. There is also the use of poorly chosen verbal words and non-verbal cues to convey messages. These unclarified or ineffective methods evoke misunderstanding of messages and so in appropriate responses are made.

The consequences of these ineffective communication evoke manifestation of poor attending attitudes, misunderstanding, less

respect and more disappointment in the aggrieved partner, more anger-argument, doing less things together and feeling lonely, neglected or even ignored. Such affected couples do not pay attention to their partner's messages and so lose sight and meaning of what is said. These complain of ineffective communications are a strong indicator of an unhealthy relationship that threatens the harmony of the family. This research study therefore, is an attempt to find out how attending and listening skills counseling could improved communication among married couples.

### Objective of the Study

The following objective is set for the study: To stimulate the use of attending and listening skills counseling to improve communication between married couples.

### Research Question for the Study

The research question for the study states that:

Ho: Does exposure to attending and listening skills counseling improve the level of communication between married couples?

### Hypothesis

The research hypothesis states that:

1. There is no significant difference in the level of communication between married couples exposed to experimental treatment and those in control groups.

### Methodology and Procedures

#### Research Design

The design adopted for this study is true experimental design of post-test only control group for data collection. This design emphasis the random (R) assignment of subjects to a treatment (X) group and control (O) group. According to Kolo (2003), it is graphically represented as follows:

R	x	O <sub>1</sub>
R		O <sub>2</sub>

R –Represents random assignment of subjects to groups or conditions either experimental or control thereby making the subjects to be equivalent.

X - Represents treatment for the group.

O - Represents post-test which involves the administration of the instrument for data collection.

In this design, the researcher can form more than two groups if the treatments are more than one. There is no pre-testing of the subjects before treatment. The data of treatment group is compare with that of control group which serves as the pre-test.

However, the subjects must be randomly assigned to either the treatment or control groups for the design to qualify to be a true experimental design. The advantages of this design include:

- It controls for most of the threats to internal validity, as such it is a powerful design.
- It provides confidentiality of the subjects because there is no pre-test.
- It eliminates pre-test sensitization of the subjects.

### Population of the Study

The population of the study were all male and female married couples in substance relationship of Evangelical Church of West Africa Denomination (ECWA) residing in Kaduna metropolitan town of Kaduna State. The population of the study were literate with at least a primary school education during the period of the study. The total population for the study was 7,955.

### Sample and Sampling Procedure

The choice of sample is determined by the design of the study. For the purpose of this study 120 samples of male and female married couples in subsistence relationship were selected from a population of 7,955. The design of the study required the formation of four groups: two groups were given treatment and the other two were controlled groups. Each group had 30 subjects randomly assigned to it for the study. In all, sixty subjects were each randomly assigned to either experimental or control groups.

The sampling procedure of assigning subjects to groups was random sampling technique. The volunteers were assigned randomly into experimental and control groups. This technique makes the subjects to be equivalent to each other.

### The Research Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was titled "Couples Communication Skills Questionnaires". It had two parts: part one deals with the biodata section while part two deals with communication skills. The instrument contains a checklist of strongly agreed (4), agreed (3), disagreed (2), and strongly disagreed (1), which gives it a four point option of likert scale. Section A of the questionnaire serves as the Biodata or demographic aspect. Part two serves as the communication skills with section A as attending skills having 25 items, section B as the listening skills part with 28 items.

### Validity of the Instrument

A pilot-test of couple's communication skills inventory questionnaire (CCSI) was carried out. A reliability coefficient of 0.882, and split-half of 0.856 were obtained. The internal consistency obtained for items was 0.911.

### Administration of the Instrument

The procedure for administration of the instrument was carried out in two phases. The first phase was the experimental treatment conducted with subjects on attending and listening skills. The experimental group received counseling treatment for six weeks consecutively. The control group received no treatment at this phase except a placebo. The second phase involved the administration of couples' communication skills inventory questionnaire (CCSI) to both the experimental and control groups. That is, all the 120 subjects were administered a post-test and responses were coded and analysed.

### Data Analysis

The statistical method employed for this study was an inferential statistics of t-text was used to analysis the data and also test the hypothesis of the study. That is to test for the difference between the samples of the study.

### Results

The hypothesis of the study states that there is no significant difference in the level of communication between married couples exposed to experimental treatment and those in control groups. The result is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Two tail t-test on effect of communication between experimental and control groups

Status	N	Mean	SD	t	df	P
Experimental group	60	57.9333	8.16746	2.991	118	0.03
Control group	60	62.3167	7.88152			

The result in Table 1 showed that subjects exposed to treatment (experiment) had a mean score of 57.9333 and SD = 8.16746 which is lower than that of control group. Those in control group had a mean score of 62.3167 and SD 7.88152 which is higher than treatment group. The t calculated value of 2.991 is significantly higher than the critical value of 1.98 at 118 degree of

### Discussion of funding

The result of tested hypothesis revealed a statistical significant difference was established between married couples who were exposed to treatment (experimental group) and those in control group. The result revealed that subjects in experimental group had a lower score than control group. This result indicates that couples' level of communication is average or moderate as a result of the counseling treatment subjects received on attending and listening skills such that they rated themselves lower based Holmes (2004) stated that every individual has the opportunity to develop their fundamentals of good communication and use them in daily life. Beverly (2006) also affirmed that couples could learn the necessary communication skills with less effort when they choose to. Rookswear and Vergola (1992) reported that learning new skills requires practice to make it work. Thus, couples learn to attend, listen, share their emotions, hopes, admit bad habits and so experience improve communication. In conversations, couples could observe non-verbals and learn to respond appropriately.

### Application for Counselling

The finding of the study showed an average or a moderate level of communication in attending and listening skills of married couples. It therefore implied that, effective attending and listening skills could be acquired and used by married couples. This

freedom (df). The level of significance 0.03 is less than 0.05 ( $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the level of communication of married couples exposed to experimental treatment and those in control group is rejected. Thus, the null hypothesis is not accepted.

on the counseling teaching given to them on how to attend by listening to words and feelings and using non-verbal's of head nod, facial, expressions and body movement in communication. A possible explanation could be attributed to the fact that partners acquire new skills and made used of them to freely express their feelings, thoughts and experiences on day-to-day happenings with one another.

The counseling treatment enabled couples to acquire attending and listening skills.

indicates that married couples could be counseled on attending and listening skills treatment programme to improve communication. Couples can be counsel to attend and listening respectfully to words, communicate how they feel and be able to listen using their body movements such as head nod, eye contact, asking questions for clarification, etc. Would-be couples could also be exposed to this treatment so as to enable them experience effective attending and listening in their marital communication. Furthermore, counselors could work with married couples who experience communication problems, to enhance their relationship through the use of attending and listening skills in every day life. This is possible when couples are encouraged to seek counseling and make real commitment to learn, make changes and practice daily to improve their communication. Thus, it is only when new

habit patterns become part of our life, will change take place in our relationship, Van Pelt (2005). Santrock (2004) made the remark that communication is critical for making and keeping relationships. All human beings desire to belong to a relationship.

### Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations are made. Married couples should try to have and maintain a cordial relationship through using effective attending and listening skills of communication. This is possible when couples adopt and use the following appropriate participation techniques in the art of communication. That is, communication:

1. Occurs spontaneously and is never forced.
2. Develops in a friendly and respectful manner.
3. Takes place in an atmosphere of freedom and not a tense situation.
4. Is open to all members of the family.
5. Favours dialogue and increases self-esteem.
6. Implies acceptance, loving relationship which is kind, tender, affectionate that involves courteous responses and an attitude of active listening.
7. Requires participation on daily basis by observing words, feelings and non-verbals.
8. Demands time and effort for effectiveness.

### Conclusion

This study, which set out to determine the level of communication improvement among married couples found out that counseling couples on attending and listening is very important for healthy relationship. It highlighted the important

virtues which married couples stand to benefit when they engage in effective attending and listening. Such virtues include: good healthy affectionate relationship, openness towards each other, involvement with one another in attending and listening, respect towards each other etc. at home. All these will enhance harmonious marital relationship and bonding between couples even in communication.

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