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ATTENDING TO WORDS SKILLS IMPROVES MARRIED COUPLES
INTERACTION: COUNSELLING IMPLICATION.

BY

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Abstract

The family which is the nucleus of the society, often times find itself in war of words with its members. Unguided statements, gossiping, backbiting, nagging and harmful words have ruined relationships, people, families and societies. This occurs as a result of inappropriate use of words and lack of knowledge about the power of words. The consequences are ineffective attending to words when expressing wants needs and feelings. Based on this observation, this research study ventured to use attending to words skills counselling to improve married couples' interaction to as certain or reject its effectiveness. A total of 30 respondents were randomly sampling and made to participate in the study from a population of 275 diploma students in Institute of Education, A.B.U., Zaria, academic session of 2009/2010; A questionnaire titled: Couples communication skills section on attending to words skills counselling was administer to the respondents. The responses were on a four point likert scale of strongly agreed (4), agreed (3), disagreed (2) and strongly disagreed (1). The data collected was statistically analyzed using t-test to determine the effectiveness or otherwise of attending to words skills among married couples. The finding of the study indicated that both male and female respondents improved the level of responsiveness in their interaction. The result showed that there is no significant difference between male and female respondents in the level of responsiveness/interaction. Based on these findings, counselling implication are drawn for the use of attending to words skills to enhance interaction within and outside the family.

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Introduction

Too often today, the husband and wife relationship which is the nucleus of the family, is characterized by bitterness, insults and animosity. For example, Kumuyi (2011) stated that one reason why some people stay away from their home is because of the naggings that characterize such homes. Gottman (1994) reported that couples engage in "harmful interaction" which creates anxiety thereby ruining the relationship. Similarly, Van Pelt, (2002) reported that some couples assassinate their partners in their speech by using put-downs which judge, criticize, ridicule and blame. Others yell, scream and shout at each other. Van Pelt, (2005) opined that many couples lament that we do not talk any more. The home for some partners, has lost its excitement.

Wrong use of words can do damage to a relationship like a raging fire. For example, according to Kumuyi (2011) a word spoken in anger can destroy permanently a relationship built over many years. Harsh words often lead to strife. Many families and marriage relationships have been destroyed through wrongful and destructive use of words. Dagari (2009) reported that several couples often complain that they do not know what to say or they might say the wrong thing or even that they are too angry to talk.

These attitudes portray difficulties in relationships as a result of the use of wrong words.

Consequently, there is need to properly choose our words when talking to others. This is because words spoken are like bullets fired from a gun, they cannot be called back (Kumuyi, 2011). Similarly, Morley (1994) affirmed that words are the window into the soul. It gives form and expression to our deepest thoughts. Also, Strand (2005) reported that:

Words have life, and they have power. When spoken, words can literally shape the destiny and future of another. Words are powerful and have deep and lasting meaning...

Statement of Problems

Marriage relationship is designed for companionship, fellowship and togetherness not for isolation or loneliness. However, couples nowadays, experience a lot of difficulties, strains and pains in their relationship. These problems usually stem from the response mode of most partners. Messages are sent through poorly chosen words. For example, negative words are used when responding to messages. At other times, a quick response of anger

or making fun of what is being said with cynicism do occur. There is also frequent misunderstanding and resentment which hinder partners from talking to each other or not responding to messages at all. These attitude of poor choice and use of words to express how one feels, often ruins relationships. This is evident where either partner use insults and a steady flow of criticism, refusing to discuss a conflict, bringing up topics unrelated to the issue under consideration or blaming, evaluating and acting superior as disrespectful judgment. The above consequences in relationships point to the fact that couples lack knowledge about the power and effects of words. Thus, there is great danger in wrongful choice and use of words.

This study therefore, attempts to use attending to words counselling to enhance married couples relationship. A research question is set for the study as follows:

Does exposure to attending to words skills
enhance the level of married couples
interaction?

The corresponding hypothesis of the study states that:

There is no significant difference in the level of attending to words between male and female respondent in treatment group?

Methodology and Procedure

Research Design

The design of this study is an experimental post-test only control group. This design according to Kolo (2003) is diagram as follows:

	Group	Variable	Post-test
R	E	X	O ₁
R	C	-	O ₂

The diagram is interpreted as follows;

R = represents random assignment of couples to groups

E = represents experimental group which receives treatment on attending to words

C = represents control group which receives no treatment

X = represents treatment which is given to

Experimental group on attending to words
counselling

O₁ = represents administration of post-test which is
given to experimental group

O₂ = represents administration of post-test which is
given to control group.

In this design, the data of treatment group is compare with that of control group which serves as the pre-test. The two groups (E & C) were randomly assigned but none was given a pre-test. The advantage of this design is that it controls must of the threats to internal validity, as such, it is powerful. Moreso, it provides confidentiality of the subjects (couples) because, there is no pre-test. Therefore, it eliminates pre-test sensitization of the subjects. However, this paper compared male and female respondents in experimental group.

Population and Sample Size of the Study

The population of the study consists of all male and female students studying various courses in Institute of Education, A.B.U., Zaria, for 2008/2009 academic session. The population of the students is 275, out of which 30 respondents were randomly

selected and participated in the experiment. The respondents were randomly assign to experimental groups and the responses of male and female were compared.

Instrumentation

The title of the instrument for the study is "Couples communication skills questionnaire" section on attending to words. It contains a checklist of statements which requires a respondent to indicate whether they consider attending to words with their partner to be agreed or disagreed. Also, the mode of response was made more elaborate to include strongly agreed or strongly disagreed in order to cross-validate the statement. That is, a likert 4 point scale was used with strongly disagreed having 1 point, disagree 2, agreed 3 and strongly agreed 4.

Experimental Phase

The experimental phase consisted of counselling treatment on attending to words with the respondents who were married students (male and female). The respondents were treated to attending to words counselling for six (6) weeks consequetively on concepts of attending and word, verbal abuse-characteristics,

attitudes and behavior, speaking rules and methods, use of I-messages-choice of words, importance of attending to words, use of encourages/compliments and affirmation. The sixth (6th) week was for administration of the instrument to respondents.

Data Analysis

The data obtained for the study was analysed using t-test where the scores of male respondents was compared with these of female respondents.

Results of the Study

The hypothesis of the study states that:

There is no significant difference in the level of attending to words between male and female respondents in the experimental group.

To determine the effectiveness or otherwise of attending to words counselling of male and female respondents in the experimental group, their responses were compared using t-test. The result is presented as follows:

Table 1: t-test on effectiveness of attending to words of male and female respondents in experimental group

Component	Variables	No	Mean scores	Std. deviation	t	df	p.
Attending to words	Male	15	2.0970	.2697	.001	28	.999
	Female	15	2.0970	.34611			

Critical value at 28 degree of freedom = 2.048 at 0.05

A look at table 1 showed the mean and standard deviation of male respondents as $M = 2.0970$, $SD = .26497$, while female respondents mean 2.0970 , $SD = .34611$. The mean of male and female respondent are the same. The observed + calculated value of .001 is lower than critical +- value of 2.048 at 28 degree of freedom. The observed level of significance ($P = .99$) is higher than 0.05 ($P > 0.05$). This result therefore, revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female respondent that participated in the experiment. Thus, the hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference in the level of attending to words between male and female respondents in experimental group, can be accepted. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion of Finding

The result of tested hypothesis of this study revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female respondents in the level of their interaction in the experimental study on attending to words skills. This result implied that both male and female respondents in the experimental study have acquired new skills of attending to words which helped in their interaction with one another and the family. This new skills of attending to words include I-message, encourages-compliments and how to present wants, needs or desires through expression of thoughts and feelings clearly for others to understand them. A possible explanation for this could be attributed to the treatment programme on attending to words counselling which enable male and female respondents who are married to become aware of positive ways which enhances interaction and those negative attitudes which hinder interaction. This finding is supported by Holmes (2004) who opined that every individual has the opportunity to develop their fundamentals of good communication by using them in daily life. Beverly (2006) concurred that couples could learn the necessary communication skills with less effort when they choose to. Similarly, Dagari (1994) reported that male

and female respondents might have had an indepth understanding of each other enough to respond effectively. However, Gottman (1994) disagreed with this finding by reporting that couples engage in harmful interaction with each other. Also, Melegosa and Melgosa (2006) affirmed that men and women communicate differently.

It is evident from this finding of the study that the procedure for treatment and the improvement observed in both male and female respondents, showed that counselling treatment programmes on attending to words skills could easily be taught to other couples. This implies that both male and female respondents could become their own "counselors" as they imbibe the skills of attending to words. This therefore, could have a positive multiplier effect on the family, and the society as couples who have undergone such treatment programmes would stand a better chance of teaching others including their children when the need arises. This becomes even more important in our society as there is still a dearth of professional marriage counsellors in Nigeria.

Counselling Implication

Since marriage thrives on a climate of love and respect, it is important that couples demonstrate such to each other. This is

because marriage is basically a relational experience which flows on wanting emotional needs. Married couples therefore are expected to interact with one another by appropriately attending to words which properly express their feelings, emotions, wants, desires and thoughts. This becomes necessary to enable both male and female partners spent quality time together, engage in sincere dialogue that is frank and maintain a positive atmosphere which creates a healthy relationship at home. When this is possible, it can signal the experiencing of quality emotional contact with one another where the power of words are taken into consideration in their usage.

Similarly, the family is the nucleus of the society where the husband and wife are the progenitors. The quality of the interaction that exists between them, would determine to a certain level the type of relationship which goes on at home and within the family. This is so because, the home is the basic and most important unit of socialization. It has been observed that many families and relationships experienced difficulties in communication especially in the area of not knowing how to talk with their partners about some things they do not like or a behavior that is irritating them. This is very sad. For most of us

understand the importance of our families and as such, we desire a satisfying relationship with them. If the interaction which goes on are negative and harmful through inappropriate choice of words, in responding or expressing self, then the relationship would be stressful. Thus, family members need to learn and be aware of how to appropriately attend to words by choosing their words when expressing their needs, wants, desires, feelings and thoughts. This is necessary because the greatest happiness and the deepest satisfaction in life come from being members of a loving family that respond to and use words effectively well with each other.

In addition, the use of words among children also helps to sustain or destroy the family. For example, in the use of words, when family members resort to the use of vulgar words, the home will be full of tension. This affects not just the home or family, but the larger society as well, because in several instances there is transfer of aggression and aggrieved one's will not concentrate on contributing meaningfully to the development of the family or society. Moreso, the children are affected as they live in a state of fear and confusion. Most of the time, they are torn as to which parent their sympathy should go to. This brings about division in the family. This possesses a serious threat to it's very existence.

Hence, there is great need for family members to be aware of the power of words and its impact. Family members need to learn how to choose words and use them appropriately to express their feelings. Its appropriate use forms within each member, a sense of cohesion, self-consciousness i.e. use words to become conscious of themselves. This is so because families merely send out their replica into the society. Family members should therefore use words that encourage the development of individual potentials and self-confidence.

Furthermore, as the pace of life continue to increase and make great demand on us, relationship problems manifest and interfere with the interaction that goes on at home and within the society. A lot of families live far apart and do not see each other often, that is mobility is a problem. even within the home, everyone's schedule is so tight that it is difficult to find enough time to eat a meal together, let alone, sit down to talk. Thus, the home is an important place where family members need to appropriately attend to words which would enhance their relationship with each other thereby provide close affection and emotional ties to experience togetherness. This can be achieved through family meetings. As a family, members need to understand

the power of words and use it properly to improve relationship at home. This is because, the most intense enthusiasm and the most profound inner peace all come from feelings of being loved and acceptance. In addition, a relax atmosphere enable family members to speak naturally and it also stimulate easy and agreeable interaction. Finally, the programme package on attending to words skills can help married couples and family members on how to reduce the frequent use of degrading words and replace them with proper expression of feelings clearly on how one feels or thinks.

Conclusion

Effective interaction, is the backbone of any successful relationship. The family as the nucleus of the society where intimacy can be felt, need to learn about the power of words and properly use it for healthy relationship between its members.

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