

EFFICACY OF SILENCE AND NEGOTIATION SKILLS TRAINING ON MARITAL CONFLICTS AMONG LITERATE MARRIED ADULTS IN ILORIN, NIGERIA.

BY

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Abstract

Silence and negotiation skills are considered essential in human interaction in controlling emotions and in resolving marital conflicts. The study is quasi-experimental research design of pre-test, post-test and control group approach, using a 3 x 2 factorial matrix. A total of 120 literate married adults were selected through purposive sampling techniques. Instrument entitled "Marital Relationship Questionnaire" was used for pre-test and post-test. It was validated by experts and subjected to test re-tests reliability technique with value of 0.87. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and Scheffe Multiple Test were used to analyse the collected data. The findings revealed that significant differences were found in SST and NST in handling marital conflicts among the participants exposed to treatments than those in the control group $F(2,117) = 7.85; p < 0.05$; SST and NST were found to be effective and there was no significant difference in handling marital conflicts among participants exposed to treatment on the basis of age and gender. The study concluded treatments were effective in handling marital conflicts among married adults. The study recommended counsellors to incorporate the two skills in counselling distressed married adults in handling their marital conflicts.
Keywords: *Silence, Negotiation, Skills training, Marital conflicts, Married adults*

Introduction

Marriage is a strong covenant and a blessed contract between a man and a woman to become one. It is a form of legal conjugal relationship, which forms the foundation of a family.. However, while couple prays for a happy marital experience, it has been noted that continuity and crisis-free marriage depends on each of the partner's effort and capability. According to Oniye (2002), marriage is a dynamic relationship worked out by each couple as they make their own transition to the new reality they have entered with the belief that things cannot be the same again. A newly married couple does not simply make superficial changes in their lives, they do not merely enter a new social status; rather, they enter an entirely different world, a world filled with the unexpected. With the unexpected, it is possible to achieve a useful and a workable relationship. If the would-be couple and married couple are adequately exposed to methods of relating with each other, like learning (training) effective way of communicating and are furnished with information needed before entering or going into marital relationship, probably, the divorce rate and other marital conflicts will be greatly reduced (Oniye, 2002).

Marital conflict refers to the existence of the high level of disagreement between married couples which disturbs the relationship to a great extent. Marital conflict is defined as a pattern of abusive behaviours by one or both partners in an intimate relationship (Hepp, 2008). Conflict is natural and inevitable in marriages and in other close relationships. Successfully managed conflicts can strengthen relational bonds and increase rational cohesion and solidarity. Conflicts occur in relationship because the individuals hold diverse values and objectives (Oetzel, Dhar, & Kirschbaum, 2007). Marriage as an institution has a lot of variables which could assist its satisfaction or promote marital conflicts. These variables include age at marriage, pattern of marriage, sexual intercourse, employment, years in marriage, spouse educational level, religion among others as Yakubu (2012) opined that in marriage there are lot of factors that could influence marriage positively or negatively

which include age of marriage, educational level of spouse, religion, income, type of marriage, fertility status, family background of spouses and culture.

Silence according to Adeoye (2003) is a temporary cessation of communication on the verbal level only and it does not mean nothing is happening. The focus of attention in communication is generally on the spoken word. It is what is verbalized that is often seen as the interaction, while silence is an integral part of interpersonal communication in every human social interaction. Cheng (2009) believed that silence is an understudied communication technique, while Idowu and Esere (2007) also opined that silence is fundamental aspect of communication which is often ignored and that it should not be equated with absence of communication.

Silence is an act of emotional intelligence, when used constructively. Toga and Thompson (2005) defined emotional intelligence as the tendency to abandon negative emotions, thoughts and behaviours towards a transgressor and transforming them into more positive emotions, thoughts and behaviours. It involves ability to identify and monitor one's own and other's emotion, to discriminate among them and to use such emotional information to guide one's thinking, actions and relationships with self and others. Silence has the power to get people to think and to act intelligently. It can help to slow down negative emotions. When spouses are in for argument, agitating, fuming and fretting, one of the best techniques to use is silence by any of the party involved. The other can literally take all the power away by simply looking and saying absolutely nothing. This is extremely difficult to do but very helpful in preventing conflicts (Steven, 2010).

Silence can be employed to handle marital conflicts especially where verbal communication proves abortive or inappropriate in resolving conflict and in nourishing marital relationship. This could be likened to the statement of Cheng (2009) that the ability to use silence appropriately and to adequately interpret the silence of others is an indispensable element for successful communication and marital stability. When used skillfully, silence can protect discussants' faces; it helps control conflict, and maintains relational harmony. Silence assists couples to communicate effectively through active listening. Silence also controls the effect of poor communication styles adopted by married adults, wrong manners of responses to conflict situations among couples through yelling, nagging and long – running arguments are signs of poor communication (Odenike, 2016). In marital relationship, communication styles could play a vital role in fostering marital happiness since couples need to communicate almost every minutes of their marriage. On the styles of communication, Ibrahim (2017) identified four styles: passive communication, aggressive communication, passive-aggressive communication and assertive communication.

Silence, would control the effect of poor communication styles the development of self- awareness and self- regulation. The period of silence brings about retrospection which allows couples to understand their strengths and weaknesses and be able to work on these areas to perform better (Goleman, 2001). The ability to work together as couple, to identify areas of conflict in the relationship makes the silence here to be meaningful and practical. Self-regulation is the ability to control emotions and impulses. Couples who self-regulate typically do not allow themselves to become too angry or jealous (Kemp, 2013). Negotiation has long been recognized as a psychological process. It is used in interpersonal and marital relations. It is a voluntary problem-solving activity in which two or more parties attempt to resolve their differences by reaching an agreement that defines their future behaviours (Smith, 2001). The art of negotiation involves skills, clear goals and sometimes being willing to compromise. Negotiation is a term used extensively in interpersonal and marital relationship. It is a method by which people settle differences, reach compromise or agreement while avoiding argument. It is also a voluntary problem- solving activity in which two or more parties attempt to resolve their differences. The point of negotiation is to try to reach agreement without causing future barriers to communication. Effective negotiation is an important way to

relieve stress and build a healthy bond between couples (Susan, 2013). Negotiation prevents marital conflict as it has been noted that, the more open the couple are the closer the bond between them. Negotiation also implies that spouses are listening to each other patiently and with empathy. Married adults who adopt negotiation can achieve marital happiness and satisfaction when they work together to resolve issues and problems that emanate between them, which can be of great benefit in resolving any differences that might arise.

Non-existence of negotiation ability has resulted into conflicts among married couples. Marriages, these days are hitting the rock, families are crumbling and the children are often left in a state of dilemma. Without negotiation, a marriage could experience conflict, frustration and misunderstanding. Communicating and making use of negotiation skills are major source of marital success and without these, it is impossible to resolve misunderstanding or conflict among married partners. Negotiation is in fact an essential and a vital tool to marital communication, as described. Negotiation skills are techniques of negotiation that can be employed by spouse to settle difference. Negotiation training itself is designed as a method of training married adults on problems solving in a manner that permits replication and dismantling of difference and to solve conflicts. It is a process by which compromise or agreement is reached while avoiding argument. Negotiation skills can be learnt and applied by spouse, which can be of great benefit in resolving any difference that arises.

Cheng (2009) advocated that couples can learn to use silence, as well as other appropriate conflict resolution strategies and tactics in handling marital conflicts. Silence and negotiation skills are integral part of interpersonal communication. The importance of silence and negotiation skills in handling conflicts in a marital relationship cannot be over-emphasized. Conflicts arise due to the ways married adults respond, yell, nag, argue and make use of poor communication styles among each other. These make therapeutic training to be imperative for married adults on how to use silence and negotiation skills constructively. Silence skills in respect of this study are not therefore the aggressive muteness but rather, pragmatic and constructive silence geared towards positive behavioural change such as active listening, retrospective, empathy, contemplation, self-awareness and self-regulation. The power of assertiveness is provided through negotiation skills among married adults to discuss issues at stake in order to prevent marital conflicts.

This situation calls for a prompt and immediate assistance to married adults as form of counselling intervention. This could be done through Marriage Enrichment Programmes (MEP). Marriage enrichment programmes according to Esere (2000) employ diverse methods sometimes referred to as “training”. The training programme focuses on personal growth and increased individual potentials that have positive effects on marital relationship. Therefore, it is against this background that this study sought to find out and examined the effectiveness of silence skills training and negotiation skills training in handling marital conflicts among married adults in Ilorin, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to: (i) determine the effectiveness of silence and negotiation skills training in handling marital conflicts among literate married adults; (ii) assess which of these therapeutic packages is more effective; and (iii) examine the effect of the moderating variables of age and gender on the treatment packages.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of SST and NST in handling marital conflicts among participants exposed to the experimental conditions and those in the Controlgroup
2. There is no significant difference in the handling of marital conflicts among participants exposed to experimental conditions of (SST and NST) on the basis of age

3. There is no significant difference in the handling of marital conflicts among participants exposed experimental conditions of (SST and NST) on the basis of gender

Methodology

Pre-test, post-test treatment and control group. A quasi-experimental design of 3 by 2 factorial matrix. The experimental levels of three groups of two treatment groups, which include Silence skills training group A, Negotiation skill training group B, but the Control group C was not expose to treatment but placed on a placebo. The participants were intact group of six levels. All the three groups were pre-tested and post-tested.

Table 1: Experimental Groups

Experimental Groups	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
A (A1 andA2) SILENCE	O1	X1	O4
B (B1 andB2)NEGOTIATION	O2	X2	O5
C (C1 andC2) CONTROL	O3	-	O6

Note

O1 means Silence group waspre-tested
 O2 means Negotiation group waspre-tested
 X1 treatment manipulated Silence Skills Training.
 X2 treatment manipulated Negotiation SkillsTraining. 04, 05 and 06 means post- test for allgroups.

All married adults experiencing marital conflicts in Kwara state constitute the population for the study while all married adults experiencing marital conflicts in six selected centers in Ilorin Metropolis were the target population for this study. Centers like religious organizations, mosques and churches were considered appropriate because they are intact group and were presumed to be places where self-disclosure is well practiced especially from members to their leaders/counsellors and where needed sample could be found. The sample size was one hundred and twenty (120) participants experiencing marital conflicts as confirmed by the researcher through the screening exercise with the pre- test measuring instrument.

Purposive Sampling technique was used to select six (6) establishments in Ilorin metropolis and 120 literate married adults were selected experiencing marital conflicts, out of 154 eligible married adults (those that got scored 55 points as the cut-off point). Each of the three groups had 20 males and 20 females, within the ages of 22 years and above. The ethical considerations included issues such as participation was voluntary, participants' responses were kept confidential and were asked to free in expressing their feelings within and outside the session. A Marital Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ) was used to generate pre-test and post-test data. The (MRQ) was developed by the researcher: MRQ has two sections, Section A focuses on demographic data, while section B has twentyitems on maritalconflicts. The instrument is structured on four points Likert-type rating scale that elicited information on marital conflicts among married adults.

Section A was scored using frequency counts and percentage, while Section B was scored on a Four-point Likert- type rating scale format with options of Always (A); Often (O); Sometimes (S); Never (N). The four options were assigned as 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The highest score was 80 (4* 20)

while the lowest score was 20 (1*20). Baseline was set at 55 points as cu-off for participants who were selected for the study.

Treatment Procedure

The treatment for the study was carried out in three phases, namely:

Pre-treatment phase:

The MRQ was administered to participants in the groups so as to collect the baseline data. This was done two weeks before the commencement of the treatment phase.

Treatment phase:

The researcher conducted the training with participants taking them through Silence Skills and Negotiation Skills Training Packages. The participants that received the treatment were only those in the experimental groups of A (A1 and A2) and B (B1 and B2). The control group C (C1 and C2) was exposed to lecture on Stress Management. The treatment was meant to teach married adults the skills that would enable them to handle marital conflicts effectively, so as not to lead to divorce or separation. The sessions were held for eight (8) weeks of forty (40) minutes perweek.

The Post-Treatment Phase

The MRQ was re-administered to participants in the treatment and control groups in order to ascertain the effects of the two counselling techniques on marital conflicts.

Treatment Sessions:

Group A: Silence Skills Training Group

Session 1: general introduction, orientation and setting of ground rules for the training programme

Session 2-6: These sessions discussed about marriage, marital conflicts, effects of marital conflicts, important of communication in marriage, concept of silence, negative and positive silence. The four skills involved for effective silence are relaxation techniques, control of emotions, active listening and consciousness of the situation.

Session 7: Review of sessions. Participants re-iterated skills learnt from the previous sessions. Question asked were answered by theresearcher

Session 8: The re-administration of MRQ to obtain post-testdata.

Group B: Negotiation Skill Training Group

Session 1: Establishing relationship and setting ground rules for the training programme.

Session 2-6: These sessions discussed about the concept of negotiation, stages and steps. The five skills involved in effective negotiation are; Withholding Judgement, Dealing with Emotions, Asking Good Questions, Creative Thinking and empathic or activelistingening.

Session 7: Review of sessions. Participants re-iterated skills learnt from the previous sessions. Questions asked were answered by theresearcher

Session 8: The re-administration of MRQ to obtain post-testdata.

Group C: Control Group

Session 1-7: General introduction, orientation, rules. The Control group C was not exposed to any treatment but were place on a placebo of a lecture titled Stress Management.

Session 8: The re-administration of MRQ to obtain post-test data. However the Control Group was also briefed on Silence and Negotiation Skill Training after the pot-test data were collected.

The data were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), t-test, Scheffe Multiple Test and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significant

Results

The results of the study are presented as follows.

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of silence and negotiation skills training in handling marital conflicts among literate participants exposed to experimental conditions and those in the control group*

Table 2: ANCOVA Results comparing Scores of the Three Experimental Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	Calculated F-ratio	Critical F-ratio	p-value
Correlated Model	74.827 ^a	2	37.413	4.15		.034
Intercept	7.482	1	7.482	.83		.375
Pretest	17.081	1	17.081	1.89		.186
Group	70.754	1	70.754	7.85*	3.92	.012
Error	153.173	117	9.010			
Total	13748.000	120				
Corrected Total	228.000	119				

*significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 2 indicates that the calculated F-value of 7.85* and p-value of .023 at 0.05 alpha level. Since p-value is smaller than the alpha level, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in handling marital conflicts among participants exposed to experimental conditions of silence skills training and negotiation skill training and those in the control group was thus rejected. On the basis of this result, it was concluded that there was significant difference in the handling marital conflicts among participants exposed to treatment (SST & NEGOST) and those in the control group ($F_{(2,117)} = 7.85$; $p < 0.05$). Based on this, hypothesis 1 was rejected.

In order to determine where the significant difference lies, the mean scores of the three groups were compared. It must be noted in this study for mean scores comparison to be significantly different, the mean scores of the post-test must be lower than the mean scores of the pre-test as it was observed in the summary of scheffe' result of Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Scheffe test of the two treatment groups with the Control

Group	N	Subsets for alpha = 0.05
Scheffe		1
SST	40	26.40
NST	40	26.98
Control	40	71.23

Note: Means in the same grouping/subset are not significantly different

Table 3 shows the Scheffe test indicating the significant difference noted in the ANCOVA results of Table 4 was caused by the relatively large difference between the mean scores of the Control group (71.23) and those of the SST (26.40) and NST (26.98) groups, the two treatments are effective and they are in the same subset 1; however, SST is more effective than NST.

Hypothesis 2: *There is no significant difference in handling marital conflicts among literate participants exposed to experimental conditions of SST and NST on the basis of age*

Table 4: ANCOVA Results comparing SST and NST of the Post-test Scores on the Basis of Age

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	Calculated F-ratio	Critical F-ratio	p-value
Correlated Model	18.250 ^a	2	9.125	.606		.551
Intercept	202.184	1	202.184	13.42		.001
Pretest	13.520	1	13.520	.89		.350
Age	4.849	1	4.849	.32	3.92	.574
Error	557.350	77	15.064			
Total	28454.000	80				
Corrected Total	575.600	79				

Table 4 shows a calculated F-value of 0.32 and p-value of .574 at 0.05 alpha level. The result reveals that p-value is greater than the alpha level. On the basis of this result, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is not rejected. It means that there was no significant difference in handling marital conflicts among participants exposed to experimental conditions of silence skills training and negotiation skills training on the basis of age which implies that both treatments were effective in handling marital conflicts among participants exposed to experimental conditions of SST and NST treatment irrespective of age.

Hypothesis 3: *There is no significant difference in handling marital conflicts among literate participants exposed to experimental conditions of SST and NST on the basis of gender*

Table 5: ANCOVA Results comparing SST and NST of the Post-test Scores on the Basis of Gender

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	Calculated F-ratio	Critical F-ratio	p-value
Correlated Model	16.988 ^a	2	8.49	.56		.575
Intercept	206.77	1	206.77	13.69		.001
Pretest	13.05	1	13.05	.86		.358
Gender	3.586	1	3.58	.23	3.92	.629
Error	558.612	77	15.09			

Total	28454.000	80
Corrected Total	575.600	79

Table 5 shows a calculated F-value of 0.23 and p-value of .629 at 0.05 alpha level. Since p-value is greater than the alpha level, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in handling marital conflicts among literate participants exposed to experimental conditions of silence skills training and negotiation skills training on the basis of gender is not rejected

Discussion

It was observed that the post-test mean scores of participants who received either of the treatments (SST or NST) were much lower than those of participants who did not receive any treatment. Possible explanation for these findings May be due to the fact that the treatments packages of silence and negotiation skills are curative, preventive and interventional in nature that aimed at mitigating conflict where it exists. Both were effective in producing significant reduction of marital conflicts among participants exposed to the treatment than those who did not receive treatment. Each of the two treatment packages facilitated positive change in behaviour in relating to marital conflicts.

The results of these studies are consistent with the findings discovered by Esere (2000) where NST was also effective and it achieved higher degree of marital conflicts resolution among selected couples in Ilorin. Steven (2010) revealed that silence stimulates and initiates growth directed behaviours among couples which could prevent conflicts.

Similarly, it was found out that there were no significant differences in the handling of marital conflicts among participants based on age and gender. Age and gender of participants had no effect on the treatment packages. These outcome could be as a result of the fact that participants of different ages and gender were exposed to the same treatment packages of silence and negotiation skill training with the same entry behaviour and participants irrespective of ages and gender wanted positive change in their marriage and they show significant improvement in their marital relationship after being exposed to the experimental condition of SST and NST. These findings are in line with the findings of Zierler (2000), Esere (2000) and Adeoye (2016) who found out that age and gender do not influence the treatment packages.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that Negotiation and Silence Skill were effective in handling marital conflicts among literate married adults.

Recommendations

It is therefore, recommended that

1. Marriage counsellors should incorporate silence and negotiation skills training in counselling distressed married adults and would-be couples to handle marital conflicts and
2. Counsellors should train married adults experiencing marital conflicts on silence and negotiation skills irrespective of age and gender so as to handle marital conflicts on their own.

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