

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Effects of Communication on Marital Adjustment of Couples in South Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria

**Dr. Idoko Boniface Idoko**

Principal, Emmanuel Secondary School Ugbokolo, Benue State, Nigeria

**Dr. Yakubu Meremu**

School Counsellor, UBE Girls' Junior Secondary School, Benue State Nigeria

### **Abstract:**

*This study examined the effect of communication on marital adjustment of couples in zone C senatorial district of Benue State. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The sample for the study consists of 376 couples drawn from Ado, Agatu, Obi, and Okpokwu Local Government Areas of Benue State. The design employed for the study was the descriptive survey design. An instrument designed by the researchers tagged Communication and Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (CMAQ) was used to collect data. The data obtained were analysed using mean scores, t-test and chi-square. The result of the study revealed that communication has significant effect on marital adjustment of couples. That is listening; non-verbal expression and verbal expression have significant effect on marital adjustment. It was found that gender differences exist in the communication and marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State. Based on the findings some recommendations were made, which include: marriage counsellors should stress on gender differences as it relates to marital communication when counselling married couples so as to enhance marital adjustment. The government, religious institutions such as churches, mosques, Non - governmental organisations, marital counsellors amongst others to organise seminars and workshops to re-orientate couples to improve on their communication to enhance marital adjustment.*

**Keywords:** *Marital adjustment, marital communication, couples, communication styles, listening, verbal communication, non-verbal communication, south senatorial district of Benue state*

### **1. Background to the Study**

Marriage brings people together to share lives, to complement one another and to make life more pleasant for each other. But very often, this is not the case for many married couples as they soon get disenchanted with each other and seem to regret their decision to marry each other. This may not be unconnected to the fact that the couples lack adequate communication styles such as listening, non-verbal expressions and verbal expressions, which are necessary for effective communication in marriage. The couple's inability to communicate their positions effectively to their spouse hinders marital adjustment.

What many people discover in marriage is often far from what they imagined it to be before getting into it. With time, everything begins to wear a new shape, the warm and romantic relationship once enjoyed begins to diminish. When couples observe in their marriage is quite at variance with their checklist and they are unable to communicate the effectively, it becomes difficult for the marriage to grow because no room is given to marital adjustment (Asher, 2011).

One major challenge of marital adjustment is concerned with the way couples communicate with each other. Most times, dissatisfaction in marriages could be curtailed through proper communication styles which include behaviour, appearance, voice quality and listening. For in communication according to Gaikwad, (2011). couples not only use speech but also the tone of their voices and the pitch of the voices and appropriate gestures. For example, if a husband frowns his face but says to the wife ' I love you', the expression on his face will certainly confuse the wife, which may lead her to suspect that the husband may only be pretending to love her. Couples inability to communicate their feelings and thoughts properly to each other can be attributed to lack of proper communication styles like listening, observation, verbal and non-verbal expressions to understand each other (Iyer, 2011).

It is no exaggeration these days to describe some couples as married singles, since they can afford to live in the same house, may be in the same room, but there will be no meaningful communication whatsoever. The communication gap appears to keep them apart such that each party faces his or her own direction, holding on to his or her own expectations rendering marital adjustment impossible. A marriage with communication failure breeds unnecessary stress, anxiety, suspicion, quarrels and unhappiness. This is because many things are repressed and left uncommunicated to the partner, which accumulates to give rise to pains, bitterness, tension, frustration and depression. Thus, the marital union becomes maladjusted.

The researcher perceived that ascertaining the effects of communication on marital adjustment of couples may enable couples in south senatorial district of Benue State to acquire appropriate communication styles like, listening, non-verbal and verbal communication expressions and also improve their marital adjustment.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

The institution of marriage, which is meant to be enjoyed, is no doubt facing serious crises in our time. In the study area, incidents of marital conflicts such as battering of wives, abandoning of wives and children, and divorce abound in many families. It is now a common scenario to see couples that underwent all the legal and religious processes of marriage ceremonies engaging themselves in some psychological and emotional fights regardless of the duration of their marriage and children produced. The impact of these on the society is obvious in the alarming rate of social vices. When couples are not able to live in harmony, the family suffers maladjustment which breeds divorce; single parenthood and delinquent behaviour among the children, the consequences of these are quite noticeable in our contemporary society: campus cultism, HIV/AIDS, insurgency, religious and political intolerance and other forms of violence in our society.

One peculiar factor in the study area that does not help matter is the image of the husband as "okpani", "aibai" (master) which gives him so much authority over the wife who often is left to grumble in silence when dissatisfied with the husband. This creates a big gap in the couple's communication as there is no opportunity to share their problems, anxieties and concerns with each other and this breeds unhappiness in the marital relationship.

The problem of the study therefore, is the effects of communication and marital adjustment of couples with a focus on the couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the effects of communication on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Determine the effect of listening on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.
- Examine the effect of non- verbal communication on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.
- Ascertain the effect of verbal communication on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.

### 1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

- What is the effect of listening on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State?
- What is the effect of non- verbal communication on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State?
- What is the effect of verbal communication on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State?

### 1.4. Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study at 0.05 alpha level

- Listening has no significant effect on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State?
- Non – verbal communication has no significant effect on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State?
- Verbal communication has no significant effect on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State?

### 1.5. Scope of the Study

The study is limited to Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State. Four local government areas namely: Ado, Agatu, Obi and Okpokwu were investigated out the nine local government areas in the zone.

## 2. Methodology

The research design used for the study was survey. The area of study is south senatorial district of Benue State. It comprises of 9 local government areas of Benue State. The population for the study is one hundred and seventy-four thousand, and twenty-seven couples.

### 2.1. Sample and Sampling

The sample of 383 was selected from the population of 174,027 couples in Ado, Agatu, Obi and Okpokwu south senatorial district of Benue State.

### 2.2. Method of Data Collection

Questionnaires were administered by the researchers and three trained research assistants to the respondents through random sampling in their homes, shops, churches, schools and offices by picking "Yes" or "No" to indicate selection or not selected.

### 2.3. Method of Data Analysis/ Presentation

Mean scores were used for all the research questions to establish whether there exists effect or not, while Chi Square was used to test hypotheses 1- 3, to establish the alpha level effects.

- Research Question 1. What are the effects of listening on the marital adjustment of couples in South Senatorial District of Benue State?

Questions	N	Mean	SD
1	376	3.47	0.60
2	368	3.10	0.69
3	372	3.34	0.60
4	373	3.40	0.64
5	376	3.39	0.64
6	347	3.21	0.73
7	356	3.29	0.65
8	353	3.27	0.63
9	353	3.08	0.70
10	353	3.37	0.65
Clustered mean		3.30	

Table 1: Mean Analysis of Listening on Marital Adjustment of Couples

The result on table 2 above shows mean scores ranging from 3.08 to 3.47 which are above the acceptable level of 2.50, a cluster mean of 3.30 with standard deviation of 0.06 which is above the acceptable level of 2.50. This implies that there is an effect of listening on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.

- Research Question 2. What are the effects of non-verbal expression on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State?

Question	N	Mean	SD
11	366	3.02	0.78
12	363	2.86	0.89
13	363	2.72	0.98
14	358	1.83	0.77
15	363	2.93	0.76
16	364	2.97	0.73
17	363	3.02	0.72
18	362	2.96	0.79
19	357	3.07	0.81
20	365	3.06	0.78
Clustered Mean		2.95	

Table 2: Mean Value of the Effects of Non-Verbal Expression on Marital Adjustment of Couples

The result gave the mean scores which range from 2.75 to 3.07, which are all above the accepted level of 2.50. The cluster mean is 2.95 which is above the 2.50 acceptable level indicating that there is an effect of non – verbal expression on marital adjustment of couples.

- Research Question 3. What are the effects of verbal expression on marital adjustment of couples in the study area?

Question	N	Mean	SD
21	344	3.38	0.63
22	360	3.21	0.65
23	361	3.14	0.68
24	362	3.15	0.63
25	360	3.19	0.74
26	363	3.21	0.67
27	359	3.11	0.76
28	365	3.08	0.73
29	362	3.17	0.70
30	363	3.29	0.69
Clustered Mean		3.19	

Table 3: Mean Value of the Effects of Verbal Expression on Marital Adjustment of Couples

The result shows the mean scores which range from 3.08 to 3.38 and a cluster mean of 3.19 which are all above the acceptable level of 2.50. This implies that verbal communication has effect on marital adjustment of couples in the study area.

- Hypothesis 1 Listening has significant effect on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.

	Value	Decision
Chi-square	158.953	
Df	27	
P	0.0003	Significant

Table 4: Chi- Square Analysis on Effects of Listening on Marital Adjustment of Couples  
X<sup>2</sup> Crit: 40.113

Chi-square value of 158.953 is significant. This is because p (0.0003) < 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that listening has significant effect on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.

- Hypothesis 2 Non- Verbal communication has no significant effect on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.

	Value	Decision
Chi-square	175.902	
Df	27	
P	0.0004	Significant

Table 5: Chi- Square Analysis on Effects of Non- Verbal Communication on Marital Adjustment of Couples  
X<sup>2</sup>crit:40.113

This result indicates that there is significant effect of non- verbal communication on marital adjustment of couples in the study area. This is because the chi-square value 175.902 has a p- value of 0.0004 which is less than 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected

- . Hypothesis 3 Verbal communication has no significant effect on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.

	Value	Decision
Chi-square	92.331	
Df	27	
P	0.0003	Significant

Table 6 Chi-Square Analyses on Effect of Verbal Communication on  
Marital Adjustment of Couples  
X<sup>2</sup> Crit: 40.113

From the table, the chi-square value of 92.331 is significant. This is because p(0.0003) < 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

### 3. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study show that listening has a significant effect on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State. This finding agrees with Nakate (2010) and Marian (2011) that being a good listener is a key to a good partner.

Another finding found that non- verbal communication has significant effect on marital adjustment of couples. This is in agreement with the assertion of Koener and Fitz Patrick and Sandifer (2011) who maintain that non-verbal expression plays a vital role in the marital adjustment of couple. The third result indicated that verbal communication has significant effect on marital adjustment of couples. This concurs with Huh (2011) and Nwaughu (2009) who maintain that verbal expression helps partners make clear what they mean.

The implication of these finding is that communication old play a very significant role in the marital adjustment of couples.

### 4. Conclusion/ Recommendation

The study found out that there is significant effect of communication on marital adjustment of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State. We therefore recommend that:

Couple should give each other listening ear so as to enhance their adjustment in marriage. Couple should identify each other's gesture for improvement in marriage.

They should clearly express their feelings to each in order to avoid misconceptions. The following suggestions were made for further researches:

- Influence of gender on communication styles of couples in south senatorial district of Benue State.
- The relationship between duration of marriage and marital communication skills of couples.

## 5. Implication for Counselling

The results of this study have counselling implication.

Marriage counsellors should organise seminars, workshops and the like where couples and already married couples would be enlightened on recipes for successful marriage.

Individual/group counselling should be given to couples facing adjustment problem in their union.

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