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Assessment of Communication Channel Skills Needed for Enhancing Relationship of Family Members in Enugu State

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Abstract

This work was designed to investigate the communication channel skills adopted by families for enhancing the relationship of family members in Enugu state. The study was specifically guided by 2 objectives. The design of the study was a descriptive survey study. The study was carried out in Enugu State. The population of the study is 360 families. This consisted of 180 families from Nsukka and 180 families from Isi-Uzo Local Governments Areas of Enugu state. Through the application of Taro Yamane formula, a sample size of 190 respondents was used for the study. The sample size consists of 95 families from Nsukka and 95 families from Isi-uzo Local Governments Areas of Enugu state. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: questionnaire on communication channels for enhancing relationship of family members (QCCERFM). The questionnaire was divided into two parts namely: Parts A and B. Part A information on the personal data of the respondents while part B of the questionnaire was further divided into three clusters in line with the specific objectives of the study. The instrument was validated by three experts. The reliability for the instrument was analyzed using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.79. A total of one hundred and ninety (190) copies of the questionnaire were administered by hand to the 190 heads of each household. One hundred and eighty-five (185) of the questionnaires was only filled and retrieved which yielded 95% return rate. The data collected from the respondents was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. In interpreting the analyzed data, items with means above 2.50 were regarded as needed while items with mean less than 2.50 were regarded as not needed. The study concludes that by recognizing and cultivating these communication channel skills, families can nurture understanding, trust, and harmony among their members, ultimately contributing to the well-being of individuals and the broader society. The study recommends that: educational institutions in Enugu State should incorporate family communication skills training into their curricula, so that benefiting students will be better equipped with vital interpersonal skills for healthier family relationships; and community leaders should organize regular workshops on effective communication within families, promoting harmonious relationships among community members and reducing family conflicts.

Keyword words: Family Heads, Communication Skills, Timing Skills, Space Practice Skills, Verbal Communication and Non-Verbal Communication.

Introduction

Communication has an enormous influence on effective family relationships. Communication is the process of creating and sending message and of receiving and evaluating messages from others (Olson & DeFrain, 2017). Communication is the process of human interaction that involves ideas to one or more receivers (Adegoke, M

and Aina, 2020). Holmes and Sachs (2015) defined communication as the process of giving and receiving information. Also, communication simply means the process of exchanging or sharing information, ideas and feelings between the sender and the receiver. Feelings and attitudes are communicated through physical gestures, words, listening, body language and tone of voice (Banes, 2018). According to Keltner and Harker (2018), where everyone is busy with work, schools or other activities, communication is vital in keeping track of what family and friends are doing and in building good family relationships. One of the main channels of communication is speech (Alberti & Emmons, 2018). People use spoken words or verbal communication as they go about their daily lives. Speech, however, is only a small part of the communication that occurs. Nonverbal communication, communication without words is also a primary means of communicating with others. Nonverbal communication has many formats such as facial expressions and gestures (Roloff & Berger, 2022).

A good family relationship is sine-qua-non for a healthy family. For any family to have good relationship, certain necessary relationship skills are required for members of the family and need to continue to improve on the skills in order to sustain a good relationship within households. According to Ekenta, Nwakile, Onah and Ekwueme (2020), a household is a group of people who live together under the same roof or in the same dwelling unit and share common living arrangements. Households can vary in composition, including families, individuals living alone, or groups of unrelated individuals who share living expenses and resources. The concept of a household is often used in demographic, economic, and sociological studies to analyze and categorize groups of people based on their living arrangements and shared resources. Some of the ways of promoting such skills has been observed by Bateman, (2016). Bateman opined that self-examination, education and counseling are ways of improving family relationships and need to develop these skills. Learning to communicate well, resolving conflict appropriately, and reaching out to others can help as well as knowing the right time to communicate and listening attentively are good family relationship skills for a health family (Hawkins & Dollahite, 2017). Couples can watch people who get along well to find out what to make their relationship work. Books and magazine articles can equally give ideas. Interacting with counsellors and more experienced people can also help. Communication takes place through communication channels.

Communication channel is the way in which a message is passed Johnson, Smith, and Williams, (2020). The main channel of communication is verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is the speech or spoken words that people use to interact with one another in their daily life. Non-verbal communication comprises of many formats such as facial expression, gestures posture, and written messages. The flow of message through a communication channel is important either at home at work, or at school (Singh, and Tyagi, 2023). Communication occurs when everyone is involved in exchanging messages. Some people dominate conversation not allowing others a chance to speak. It is important that communication helps information flow between participants

Participants are those individuals that send and receive messages (Bateman, 2016). The participants in this study are family members (father, mother or the children) and family members are always managed by family heads. Family head is a person who takes care of a household by providing practical support and maintenance to the people living in their household, based on moral or legal obligation (Miller, & Rollnick, 2022). According to Banes, (2018), Family head is a person who takes care of the family. They make sure everyone in the family has what they need, and they are responsible for the home. Fatimayin, (2018) also noted that although traditionally in many cultures men are recognized as the family heads, some

women still take up the role of family heads in most cultures of the world. Family head is important because they can protect the family's home from being taken away if they have financial problems. Obi, (2017) stated that in most cases the balance between the family members is missing due to inadequate communication which would have helped to maintain good relationships in the family such as promoting self-confidence, sense of belonging, showing love and compassion, acceptability and giving the family member enough time to express their self.

Timing is known as the appropriate time to send a message. It affects how the message is received. Nwachukwu (2017) noted that choosing a time when the receiver will be ready and willing to listen to the message to send is not always easy. Communication occurs only when the timing is right and both sender and receiver can focus on the exchange of messages to bring understanding for good relationship as well as adequate space. Space in communication cannot be underestimated. According to Olayiwola, (2020) use of space is how close one gets to others when communicating with another person. According to Omoregie, (2017), the closer together one is, the more casual, intimate communication is. Developing the elements of communication will help families working through the challenges involved in family living successfully (Okonkwo, 2018). Keeping relationship vital by spouse is the priority when demands of work and raising of young children threatens to overwhelm the family. Some relationships needed in the family which include decision making, conflict resolution, ability to manage resources, compromise commitment, role relationships, sexual relationships, mutual caring, support and flexibility can be solved through proper communication. Bateman, (2016) stated that with these skills acquired, and smooth transaction achieved, family life would become more satisfying and family members would be able to be more effective in meeting their challenges. Bateman (2016) went further to state that each communication process is composed of several stages, each of which offers potential barriers to successful communication.

Family members with good verbal, nonverbal and communication skills help facilitate the sharing of information between people within the family members. It is very important that family members should employ adequate communication skills whilst communicating with the family members in order to ensure that clarity of messages sent and received in order to prevent conflict.

Statement of the Problem

In most Nigerian families, less attention is placed on family communication as it is considered a concept where everyone is experienced and therefore, qualified to handle related issues arising from communication (Akintayo, & Fakorede, 2019). Skills needed in communicating with the family members, therefore, are not developed and utilized because these skills are considered not relevant. Brown, Jones, and Johnson, (2018) stated that the challenges of family living present enormous challenge which when not properly handled, can lead to conflicts among family members. Many societal changes have taken place in Enugu state and caused slow deterioration of the family unit such as economic difficulties, and the seemingly high rate of cases of marital instability and divorce. The researcher observed in Enugu state through preliminary studies that children's experiences of family communication lay the foundation for their communication skills throughout their lifespan. Successful communication helps families as individuals and as a collective unit, to be responsive to change and to cope with and adapt to internal and external pressures. Therefore, the study found out the communication channel skills adopted by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study was to determine the communication channels skills adopted by families for enhancing

relationship of family members in Enugu State. Specifically, the study.

1. Determined communication channel skills that are needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State.
2. Determined the timing skills needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State.
3. Determined the space practice skills needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State.

Methodology

Research Design: The design of the study was a descriptive survey study. Nworgu (2015) stated that survey research design aims at collecting data on and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics (such as attitude, activities, motivations and opinions), features or facts about a given population. It is interested in describing certain variables in relation to the population and stating the events the way they are. The survey design was therefore considered suitable for this study because the researcher sought to ascertain the opinions of respondents on communication methods adopted by families for enhancing the relationships of family members in Enugu State.

Area of the study: The study was carried out in Enugu State. Enugu State is known for its rich cultural diversity and unique family dynamics. Understanding the communication channels and skills needed within families in this cultural context is crucial for tailoring effective communication strategies that respect and enhance familial relationships. Furthermore, Enugu State encompasses a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, from urban to rural settings. Studying communication skills within families across these diverse settings allows for a comprehensive understanding of how economic factors impact communication dynamics within families.

Population of the Study: The population of the study is 360 family heads. This consisted of 180 family heads from Nsukka and 180 family heads from Isi-uzo Local Governments Areas of Enugu state.

Sample and Sampling techniques: The simple random sampling technique was employed to get the sample size. Through the application of Taro Yamane formula, a sample size of 190 respondents was used for the study as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size

N = Population size

e = 5% level of significance.

To determine the sample size, we apply the formula:

$$n = \frac{360}{1+360(5\%)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{360}{1+360(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{360}{1+360(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{360}{1+0.900}$$

$$n = \frac{360}{1.900} = 189.500$$

Therefore, sample size, n = 190

The sample size is 190 respondents which consist of 95 family heads from Nsukka and 95 family heads from Isi-uzo Local Governments Areas of Enugu state.

Method of data collection: The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: questionnaire on communication channels for enhancing relationship of family members (QCCERFM). The questionnaire was divided into two parts namely: Parts A and B. Part A contained information on the personal data of the respondents while part B of the questionnaire was further divided into three clusters in line with the specific objectives of the study. The instrument was validated by three experts. The reliability for the instrument was analyzed using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.79. A total of one hundred and ninety (190) copies of the questionnaire were administered by hand to the 190 heads of each household. One hundred and eighty-five (185) of the questionnaires was only filled and retrieved which yielded 95% return rate.

Data Analysis Techniques: The data collected from the respondents was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. In interpreting the analyzed data, items with means above 2.50 were regarded as needed while items with mean less than 2.50 were regarded as not needed.

Results

Data in Table 1 below shows the communication channel skills that are needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State. The table indicates that all the items have mean values ranging from 2.89 — 3.28 which shows that the mean value of each of the item was above the cut-off point of 2.50. It also indicates that the families in Enugu are aware of these communication channels needed by families. The table also showed that the standard deviations (SD) of the items are within the range of 0.97 — 1.12. This indicates that the mean values of the respondents were not far from one another in their responses. The sectional mean is 2.94 which are greater than 2.50 showing generally, that the respondents agreed that all the items were the communication channel skills needed by families.

Table 1: Mean responses and standard deviation of respondents on the communication channel skills that are needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Ability to engage in active listening to concentrate and understand each member of the family.	3.10	1.05	Needed
2	Ability to express thoughts, ideas and information with family members through spoken words.	2.89	1.12	Needed
3	Ability to communicate with family members through good tone, low pitch, volume and pace of speech.	3.18	1.01	Needed
4	Ability to keenly listen to family members, responding appropriately, demonstrating respect and understanding.	3.28	0.88	Needed
5	Ability to communicate with family members through non - verbal languages such as cues, facial expressions and gestures.	2.97	0.97	Needed
6	Ability to express thoughts, ideas and information with family members through written words.	3.05	1.07	Needed
7	Ability to reach agreement between family members through effective communication and persuasion.	2.83	1.09	Needed
8	Ability to employ empathy in understanding emotions, feelings and perspectives of family members.	2.87	1.03	Needed
9	Ability to employ emotional intelligence in recognizing feelings or emotional triggers of family members.	3.02	1.05	Needed
	Ability to communicate with family members without misinterpretation or misleading family members.			

Table 2 below showed the timing skills needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State. The data presented in table 2 revealed that all the items have mean values ranging from 2.98 - 3.41. This shows that the mean value of each of the item was above the cut-off point of 2.50. This is an indication that respondents accepted the items as the timing skills needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members. The table also showed that the standard deviations (SD) of the items are within the range of 0.87 to 1.05 indicating that the mean values of the respondents were not far from one another in their responses.

Table 2: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Timing Skills Needed by Families for Enhancing Relationship of Family Members in Enugu State.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Ability to schedule when to spend quality time together with family members	3.06	0.96	Needed
2	Ability to prioritize Family time over other activities	2.98	0.97	Needed
3	Ability to create family calendar on how to carry out family related activities such as cooking, having dinner, family prayer sessions etc.	3.13	0.98	Needed
4	Ability to set boundaries around work and personal time	3.02	1.01	Needed
5	Ability to establish family routines among every member of the family	3.41	0.87	Needed
6	Ability to choose a time when the family member will be ready and willing to communicate with each other	3.30	0.76	Needed
7	Ability to treat every member of the family with respect while communicating	3.05	0.99	Needed
8	Ability to encourage family members to share their ideas and experiences for the general wellbeing of the family	3.07	1.05	Needed
9	Ability to get closer to the family member to show them a sense of belonging	3.11	0.94	Needed

Table 3 below showed the space practice skills needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State. The data presented in table 3 revealed that all the items have mean ranging from 3.05 - 3.41. This shows that the mean value of each of the item was above the cut-off point of 2.50. This is an indication that respondents accepted the items as the space practice skills needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members. The table also showed that the standard deviations (SD) of the items are within the range of 0.87 to 1.05 indicating that the mean values of the respondents were not far from one another in their responses.

Table 3: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Space Practice Skills Needed by Families For Enhancing Relationship of Family Members in Enugu State.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Ability to provide shelter and enough room space for each member of the family.	3.05	0.99	Needed
2	Ability to provide comfortable basic amenities in the form of spacious bedroom, toilets, kitchen to promote comfort among the members of the family	3.07	1.05	Needed
3	Ability to provide spacious rooms so as to promote privacy among each family member.	3.13	0.98	Needed
4	Ability to provide recreational space areas such as table tennis room, game room etc to promote cohesion and unity among the family members.	3.02	1.01	Needed
5	Ability to create a comfortable meeting room such as sitting room, dining room or home library where family members can meet to interact and promote family cohesion.	3.41	0.87	Needed

Discussion

The findings of the study in table 1 revealed the communication channel skills that are needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State. The findings of the study highlight several key communication channel skills necessary for enhancing family relationships in Enugu State. The findings is in line with the findings of Olson and DeFrain (2017) who emphasized the need for families to have realistic expectations of each other to reduce conflict and disappointment and effective communication is an important characteristic of strong, healthy families. Communication within the family is extremely important because it enables members to express their needs, wants, and concerns to each other. Open and honest communication creates an atmosphere that allows family members to express their differences as well as love and admiration for one another. The findings are also in line with Akintayo, and Fakorede, (2019) who found that active listening and empathy in family communication are important communication channel skills, and it is through communication that family members are able to resolve the unavoidable problems that arise in all families. Just as effective communication is almost always found in strong, healthy families, poor communication is usually found in unhealthy family relationships. Poor communication can lead to numerous family problems, including excessive family conflict, ineffective problem solving, lack of intimacy, and weak emotional bonding. Poor communication is also associated with an increased risk of divorce and marital separation and more behavioral problems in children.

The findings of the study in table 2 revealed the timing skills needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State. Hidayah, Lestari, and Artha, (2021) supported the findings of the study by stating that family members need to establish timing skills by engaging in active listening which focuses on understanding the speakers' underlying meaning and intent. Also family members are supposed to develop the ability to engage in seamless verbal communication involving concise expression of thoughts, ideas and information through written and spoken words. The findings also align with communication theory, as effective communication often depends on selecting the right moment to engage in a conversation as revealed by Eze (2016). The notion of choosing an appropriate time to send a message corresponds with the concept of temporal communication competence, as discussed by Alozie and Onu (2019). It suggests that successful communication often depends on considering the timing of messages. The finding also aligns with Olapegba, and Okuneye, (2019) who stated that families should develop timing skills which will foster strong bond and relationship. Such skills include active listening skills especially when members of family are emotionally down, showing empathy when a family member needs it, effective verbal and non-verbal communication at the appropriate time which will help families to build rapport, understand others' perspective and navigate social interactions with respect.

Table findings in table 3 showed the space practice skills needed by families for enhancing relationship of family members in Enugu State. The findings are in consonance with Holmes and Sachs (2015) who stated that provision of shelter can contribute to awareness-raising and social change as part of broader effect to promote space practices among family members. Similarly, Miller, and Rollnick, (2022) stated that space practice skills such as provision of rooms and houses have a role in strengthening the quality of life that family members live in the society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study shed light on the essential communication channel skills required to enhance family relationships in Enugu State. The study highlights the significance of realistic family expectations, effective communication with each family member, sensitivity to family members'

needs, thoughtfulness in communication, sharing both successes and failures, demonstrating commitment in family relationships, flexibility in dealing with family members, and the use of vivid language and active verbs in communication. The study concludes that by recognizing and cultivating these communication channel skills, timing and space practice skills, families can nurture understanding, trust, and harmony among their members, ultimately contributing to the well-being of individuals and the broader society. Based on the findings of the study, the following were recommended.

1. Educational institutions in Enugu State should incorporate family communication skills training into their curricula. This will ensure that benefiting students will be equipped with vital interpersonal skills for healthier family relationships.
2. Local media outlets should run public awareness campaigns on the importance of family communication, fostering a culture of open dialogue within families and strengthening community bonds. Government agencies should establish accessible family counseling centers across the state, providing professional guidance to families in crisis. Community leaders should organize regular workshops on effective timing and space practice skills needed by families, promoting harmonious relationships among community members and thereby reducing family conflicts.

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