

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AMONG COUPLES IN INTER-ETHNIC MARRIAGES IN PORT HARCOURT CITY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study was set out to identify the challenges experienced during communication exchanges among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City LGA of Rivers State. The objectives were to ascertain the modes of communication used among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State, determine the communication effectiveness among the couples, ascertain the barriers to effective communication among them, and determine the communication strategies employed by such couples to address their communication challenges. Social exchange theory was adopted as theoretical framework while the survey method was used as the research design. The population of Port Harcourt City LGA as at 2023 was put at 774,600 and the purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed to select members of the sample size of eighteen (18) respondents. Data was gathered from three focus groups of eighteen (18) respondents through the use of focus group discussion guide. Data gathered were presented and analyzed through the qualitative method. It was discovered that the mode of communication used among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City LGA in their various homes is generally verbal (oral) communication. It was discovered that the communication effectiveness among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City LGA was usually achieved by the use of communication competences which included making efforts to learn some bits and pieces of their spouses' native languages. The barrier to effective communication among inter-ethnic couples in Port Harcourt City LGA was basically language barrier and there was usually no communication breakthrough with their children using native languages except English. Lastly, it was discovered that other communication strategies employed by couples in inter-ethnic marriages include creating time for dialogue about their misunderstandings and seeking clarification of the message being passed across when it is unclear what the other party is saying. It was recommended that Nigerian indigenous languages which are rich in content both for communication and upbringing of the children should be used in the home. The people in inter-ethnic families should always seek clarification of the message being passed across to them when they have doubts about the intended message and be sure that message conveyed is message received. Members of inter-ethnic families should develop listening skills and pay more attention to decode correctly the messages in the non-verbal cues that are usually embedded and unsaid in the verbal communications made.

Key Words: Communication, Competence, Communication Strategies, Culture, Effective Communication, Inter-ethnic marriage, Language

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an age long characteristics of mankind. One of the units where communication takes place from time to time is marriage. Such communication in marriage, simply involves intimacy, closeness, emotions, characters and behaviours in a face to face relationship between husband and wife as well as the family who share common bond of commitment. Marriage is one of the most important demographic indicators of integration of ethnic groups in multicultural societies (Penny and Khoo, 1996). Among the most outstanding challenges for couples in marriage are communication issues.

Communication through the use of language especially, is indeed an indispensable part of human existence. According to Watzlawick (1967) cited in Ndimele and Innocent (2006), man cannot “not” communicate. And in order for man to communicate effectively, he has to employ the use of language. Language is a vehicle which humans use to convey messages from one person to another. It is like the central nervous system of the body. Man needs language as well as other codes, symbols, and signs to effectively share his thoughts, feelings and ideas. Its function cuts across vital issues of life such as culture, customs, values, belief systems, identity, as well as integrity. It is a unique property exclusively made for man, no wonder language development occurs in all children with normal brain function regardless of race, culture or general intelligence, an ability humans can acquire for effective communication.

Ndimele and Innocent (2006) observe that language is often described as a semiotic system because it entails the use of certain agreed-upon symbols or signals to convey meaning from one person to another. The act of conveying information for the purpose of creating a shared understanding is something that humans do every day. Language is so important in any society for the purpose of communication and communality.

In marriage homes, language is the medium of communication between husbands and wives on one hand, and parents and children on the other. It forms the whole activities of the home. Well of course, except the couples or their children are physiologically challenged linguistically – i.e. deaf and dumb. Even at that, communication is still ongoing either by writing or shared codes, symbols, signs, signals and other forms of nonverbal communication. In all, interaction through verbal communication or speech takes up their daily relationship with others (Yul-Ifode, 2001). Communication is socialization, it is culture, it is togetherness, and it is life. They all need language or a shared code to express themselves in the home.

The marriage institution is an important institution that navigates the inter-cultural world. It is a foundation of the home where the family exists as an agent of socialization. Marriage can be seen as a socially or ritually recognized union between spouses that establish rights and obligations between those spouses as well as between them and any resulting biological or adopted children and affinity (in-laws) and other family through marriage. Westermack (1968) sees marriage as a more or less durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation. From Mack’s definition it can be agreed upon that couples who overcome communication challenges like language barrier, physical barriers, and social-psychological barriers are likely to last longer in inter-ethnic marriages and marriage in general. This accounts for why speaking, listening, observing, questioning, processing, analyzing, and evaluating are tools for communication in marriages.

Inter-ethnic or intercultural or mixed marriages are those marriages in which the husband and wife are from different ethnic groups, tribes or people. The scenario of marrying outside one’s ethnicity will give rise to the challenge of having to cope with constraints in their communication process and to adapt to a different culture, language, belief, value, ideology, philosophy, perception, personality and identity. Globalization is influencing all areas of life and recent trends demonstrate that increased numbers of intercultural marriages are occurring (Waldman & Rubalcave, 2005). People from different ethnic nationalities, who come together because of work, school, business and other human endeavours, live together in spite of their differences in the society. Man is a social being and is constantly in conflict and tension with his fellow man. Most of the conflict is caused by communication gap.

It is interesting to note that inter-ethnic marriage couples can have a healthier and happier marriage despite the differences in their personalities (Gottman, 1999). Marriage is the foundation of homes and an important agent of socialization. Those in one marriage or another will agree that there are a whole lot of challenges involved, but these challenges are even more challenging when the marriage is a mixed or inter-cultural or inter-ethnic marriage. This is so because the challenges will now include language barrier like interpersonal, verbal, non-verbal communication, cultural

differences apart from the regular differences in beliefs, norms, values, personality, identity, and world views.

Thus, the spouses – husband and wife – who belong to different ethnic groups are faced with language problems, intervention from third party within family circle, selfish interest, culture shock, cultural differences and different world views. In this regard, marriage can be relied upon as a major factor in socialization, communality, cultural and world peace. Thus, the challenges of communication among inter-ethnic marriage couples will definitely include the language of communication as well as other modes of communication.

Mcquail as cited by Hasan (2014) sees human communication in linear terms as the sending of meaningful messages from one person to another. These messages could be oral or written, visual or olfactory. Laws, customs, practices and ways of dressing, gestures buildings, gardens, military parades and flags are all part of culture, a way people live their day to day lives. Man simply needs to relate with his fellow man, express himself, and share his belief, ideology, perception, and general world view as obtained in his culture. Culture is a way of life of a people. According to Charles Kraft (1969), culture is the label anthropologists give to the structured customs and underlying worldview assumptions which govern people's lives. Based on that premise, people of differing structured customs and underlying worldviews may have difficulties sharing information, ideas, feelings and emotions which are the essence of communication in the first place.

In the light of the assertion above, couples in inter-ethnic marriages ought to know and understand that one cannot impose his or her culture on the other. There has to be mutual intelligibility, openness and considerations bearing in mind that it is impossible for two dissimilar cultures, ideologies, perceptions and worldviews to have the same understanding. The only way to break some of the communication gap in marriage is by effective communication, communication competence, and acculturation through learned pattern.

Inter-ethnic marriage is a trend in Nigeria, a multilingual and multicultural society. The rise is so much compared to our parents' generation. Because of the economic and political activities, people (males and females) migrate from one geographical location to another in order to make ends meet. Commercial cities like Port Harcourt, Lagos, Calabar, Kano, Onitsha and Aba are populated with people from different cultures and ethnic groups. This scenario above has brought about marriages which produce children either biologically or by adoption. People have migrated and settled for one reason or another and have got families in spite of the language and culture differences all over the country. Port Harcourt Metropolis, the capital of Rivers State is one of the cities in Nigeria that are unique in their state of diversities. The City is home to different languages, cultures and peoples, hence the diversities. The researcher resides in the city of Port Harcourt has noticed that some inter-ethnic marriages have issues/problems.

Thus, the scenarios mentioned above formed the bases for which this research was embarked upon. They formed the motivation for the study. To this end, the researcher is interested in examining the challenges being experienced during the communication exchanges among couples in inter-ethnic marriages using Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State as a case study.

Statement of the Problem

This study centres on the challenges in communication among inter-ethnic marriage families in the society which can be as a result of communication gap, communication breakdown and other challenges especially intervention from third party within family circle. Of course it is peculiar to all marriages that there will be one issue/problem or another, but a good number of couples in these marriages (some of which may have lasted several years) still opt out of the union. There is usually culture clash and culture erosion when two cultures meet as one may tend to overshadow or dominate the other. Culture is the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, social hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relationships, concepts of the

universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of generations through individual and group striving.

Another problem in such inter-ethnic marriage is with how to achieve effective communication. Communication can be effective or ineffective due to a number of reasons. Achieving effective communication is one major problem in inter-ethnic marriages. Sometimes, the intended message from either of the couple is not the message received by the other party. Nonverbal cues may be wrongly interpreted and compliments may be perceived as insults.

Conflict in inter-ethnic marriages can be as a result of noise in communication, personality differences, situational factors and the mode of communicating in the family (e.g. use of a common language or languages). Sometimes too, communication in inter-ethnic homes could be one sided leaving one of the spouses to be in control of every communication exchange rather than it being bilaterally or mutually controlled (interactive).

Lastly, communication challenges can lead to eventual collapse of the marriage. One of the reasons for increasing rate of divorce is because couples are unable to resolve their communication and other differences. Some partners are usually alienated from discussion with their in-laws and they sometimes feel the issues being discussed are about them because they do not understand or speak the languages being used. Where there is no one to interpret and clear the doubts for them, the issues usually degenerate into suspicion, disagreement and offense. Therefore, this study investigates communication challenges in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.

Objectives of the study

The study is focused on the following objectives:

- 1). To ascertain the modes of communication used among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- 2). To determine the communication effectiveness among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.
- 3). To ascertain the barrier to effective communication among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.
- 4). To determine the communication strategies employed by couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area to address their communication challenges for better relationship.

Research questions

The study sought to answer and focus on the following research questions:

- 1)What modes of communication are used among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- 2)What is the communication effectiveness among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?
- 3)What are the barriers to effective communication among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?
- 4)What communication strategies are employed by couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area to address their communication challenges for better relationship?

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Interpersonal Communication

A large number of scholars collectively identify with and use the term interpersonal communication to describe their own work. However, they also recognize that there is considerable variety in how they and their colleagues conceptually and operationally define this area of study. In

some regards, the construct of interpersonal communication is like the phenomena it represents—that is, it is dynamic and changing. While there are many definitions available, interpersonal communication is often defined as the communication that takes place between people who are interdependent and have some knowledge of each other. Interpersonal communication includes what takes place between a son and his father, an employer and an employee, two sisters, a teacher and a student, two lovers, two friends, and so on. Although largely dyadic in nature, interpersonal communication is often extended to include small intimate groups such as the family. Interpersonal communication can take place in face-to-face settings, as well as through media platforms, such as social media (Corbin & White, 2008).

The study of interpersonal communication looks at a variety of elements that contribute to the interpersonal communication experience. Both quantitative/social scientific methods and qualitative methods are used to explore interpersonal communication. Additionally, a biological and physiological perspective on interpersonal communication is a growing field. Within the study of interpersonal communication, some of the concepts explored include the following: personality, knowledge structures and social interaction, language, nonverbal signals, emotion experience and expression, supportive communication, social networks and the life of relationships, influence, conflict, computer-mediated communication, interpersonal skills, interpersonal communication in the workplace, intercultural perspectives on interpersonal communication, escalation and de-escalation of romantic relationships, interpersonal communication and healthcare, family relationships, and communication across the life span (Manning, 2014).

Interpersonal communication can fail to serve its purpose if too many symbolic gestures are used, as there is a fair chance that no two individuals will attach the same meaning to a symbolic meaning, which is referred to as bypassing, and when there is a lack of language and listening skills. Emotional interference and physical distractions like faulty acoustics and noisy surroundings also act as barriers to interpersonal communication.

Culture

Ayakoroma (2011) opines that:

Culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by the people in an attempt to meet the challenge of living in their environment, giving order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing people from their neighbours (para.1).

Ayakoroma's position sees culture as any pattern of living developed by humans through interaction with their environment that identifies them as distinct from others. It creates a process of natural adaptation to one's surrounding, making life easier for people.

Some definitions of culture, by authors who oppose the lumping together of psychological/internal items with external items, try to choose between the external and internal items as their focus. Boyd and Richerson (1985) define culture as "information capable of affecting individuals' behaviour, that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission" (p. 5).

The eminent anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) are of the view that "culture is not behaviour...but something abstracted from behaviour" (p. 114). This conception of culture as an intangible abstraction, raises questions about the reality of culture and its existence. Their views are in contradistinction to the opinions of Preiswerk and Dominique (1978), who consider tangible items (such as artworks), and not their abstractions only, as inclusive of culture. They define culture as:

the complex of values, behaviour patterns and institutions of a human group, which are learned, shared and transmitted socially. It includes all the creations of man: the cosmogonies,

and ways of thinking, the image of man, value systems, religion, customs, symbols, and myths. It also encompasses the material works of man, technology, method of production, the system of exchange as well as social institutions and moral and judicial rules (p. 3).

From this definition, one can deduce that culture refers to the language, beliefs, values, dressing, art, skills and other things that people learn consciously or unconsciously which make up the way of life of a society. Similarly, Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2010) assert that "definitions of culture commonly mention shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, norms and material objects and all are quite correct" (p. 10).

Culture is a shared way of life or social heritage that provides the rules for playing the game of life. Obafemi (2013) emphasizing the pertinence of culture to any human society, asserts that culture is "the way of life and shared heritage of a given human society, including their arts, artefacts, symbols, languages, mores, customs, laws, religion, and the patterned behaviour of their social and political organizations..." (p. 36). His observation gives credence to earlier postulates that cultural elements are largely responsible for the flourishing of human societies.

Obafemi's (2013) point of view is in line with that of Nwegbu, Eze and Asogwa (2011) who posit that culture is a pattern of human activities and the symbols that give these activities significance. It is what people eat, how they dress, what they believe in and the activities they are engaged in. Culture is transmitted. The manner of thinking, behaviour and action, learnt by people who are part of a given community, distinguishes them from members of other communities.

Gudykunst (2004) submits that culture is the rule for living and functioning in a society. The rules will differ from culture to culture and need to be learned to be in a particular culture. Tylor (1881) suggests that humans were the only species that possessed culture, as defined above. In his opinion, there exists a mental gulf separating the lowest savage from the highest ape. Modern day scholars challenge this notion as they believe that if the definition of culture was broader based, then one might even say apes have culture, as they exhibit socially transmitted behaviours.

Culture is the most essential part of all human existence. It is the hallmark of the distinction as well as the connection between one people and another. Humans act in accordance with a culture which may be indigenous to them or otherwise, at one stage of their lives or another. Simply put, one's culture is an expression of who one is; providing one with an identity or sense of self (Lustig & Koester, 2006).

Aspects of culture

Culture consists of several aspects, about which knowledge and/or skills are acquired through the process of cultural learning. Gamble and Gamble (2002) consider these elements to include: knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artefacts. From the point of view of Igbani (2005), cultural elements can be grouped roughly into institutions, the rules or norms which govern behaviour; ideas, encompassing beliefs, knowledge and values; and the material products or artefacts created and used in the course of their lives.

McGee (1980) observes that sociology as a field of study views culture as being made up of two large and interrelated configurations or components, namely: material and non-material culture. As reported by Macionis (2006), material culture refers to "physical creations of a society..." (p. 36). These materials include things with physical existence which we touch, feel and see, such as buildings (structures), cultural monuments, artworks, musical instruments, food, dressing, etc.

Non-material culture refers to "symbolic human creations..." (Macionis, 2006, p. 36). It encompasses aspects of culture without physical existence, which include language, customs and traditions, norms and values, festivities, rites and rituals, etc. Iheriohanma (2002) cites Aginsky as saying that non-material culture can further be sub-divided into: normative culture and cognitive culture. The level of practice and transmission of these elements from one generation to the next is

to a large extent influenced by the society, especially the mass media. The clothes worn by members of a tribe constitute their "cultural attire" and are symbolic elements of cultures across the world, and distinguish members of one tribe from members of another tribe. The Agbada (a flowing gown) and Asooke (a hand-woven material) are typical Yoruba attires. While the Isi agu (lion head wrapper) and red cap constitute the unique attire of the Igbo man. The types of food consumed and their mode of preparation are unique to every community and constitute the traditional cuisine.

Nigeria as a heterogeneous nation has of a multiplicity of dietary habits (Igah, 1991). The Yoruba are well known for meals such as Amala and Eforiro (yam flour and vegetable soup), the Igbo uniquely prepare Abacha (a cassava meal) and Ugba (African oil bean) to mention but a few. Custom and traditions are long established practices common to a specific people (Emry, 2012). They are habitual practices that have become part of the way of life of a given people. For example, the ancient Yoruba custom of prostrating before elders is still observed today (Asadu & Usua, 2011). Festivals are events ordinarily staged in a community, usually once a year, centring on celebrating some unique aspect of that community and its traditions (Hornby, 2010). Examples include the Osun/Osogbo Festival of the Yoruba people, celebrated in August each year in Osogbo town in Osun State, to honour the goddess of Oshun river. The new Yam Festival, a harvest celebration of the Igbo people is held at the end of every farming season, usually in August, in honour of their earth goddess – Ani and to mark the beginning of harvest (Adah, Chikelu & Chiama, 2014).

Norms are expectations by which a society guides the behaviour of its members (Macionis, 1997). A norm is therefore prescriptive, specifying what members of a group or society should or should not do, also what rewards or punishment should be given for proper observance or contravention respectively. William Graham cited in Iheriohanma (2002) stipulates that violations of norms usually provoke wild feelings or the raising of eyebrows. In various societies, punishment may range from avoidance or social isolation, through ridicule, to death. Strict observance of norms is essential for the smooth functioning of the society and welfare of its members.

Language, the key to the world of culture, is a system of symbols (in the form of spoken or written words) that allows members of a society to communicate with one another (Macionis, 1997). Human culture without language is unthinkable (Samovar and Porter, 2004). Natural languages are spoken or signed, but can be encoded into secondary media using stimuli such as auditory (e.g.; whistling), visual (e.g.; graphic writing) or tactile (e.g.; Braille).

Intercultural Communication

Communication is a tool used by all humans regardless of the culture from which they come and is crucial to the survival of humans (Casmir, 1978). Communication is effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to the message that is relatively similar to what was intended by the person transmitting it (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001, p. 60). This message may appear simplistic until introducing concepts such as gender and cultural differences including languages, nuances, expectations, and traditions. As individuals from various cultures interact and speak with one another, differences and similarities surface. Dissimilarities may include philosophies, worldviews, and values.

In the early 1950s, Hall and his colleagues at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute presented a framework by which to study intercultural communication (Jiang, 2006). By the early 1980s, scholars such as William Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim were formulating intercultural communication theories. The field of intercultural communication continues to broaden and develop various theories for this intriguing phenomenon.

Dyadic communication and Relationships

Dyadic communication is the part of a relationship that calls for "something to happen". Partners will either talk or argue with one another during this point of a relationship to bring about change. When partners talk or argue with one another, the relationship may still survive at this point.

Bochner (2000) stresses inherent dialectic in interpersonal communication as the key to healthy marital dyads. He proposes that people in intimate relationships are looking to find an equilibrium point between needing to be open with their partner and needing to protect their partner from the consequences of this openness. Therefore, the communication in romantic, long-term relationships can be viewed as a balance between hiding and revealing. Taking this theory even further, communication within marriages can be viewed as a continuing refinement and elimination of conversational material. The partners of the marriage will still have things to discuss, but as their relationship and communication grows, they can decide when to not speak about an issue, because in complex relationships like marriage, anything can become an issue.

Communication Strategies among Married Couples

Couples who have healthy marriages, love and respect each other and use many factors that are important in the success of a marriage. The ability to communicate with each other has been adjudged the best in marriage relationship. Despite the difficulties couples may experience those who can communicate clearly with each other have a much better chance of overcoming problems and staying together.

Effective communication can keep marriages together even in the most difficult times. One can conclude that the most important element of a successful marriage should be the couples' ability to communicate with each other. Gottman and Levenson (1988) have offered specific couple communication patterns that contributed immensely to satisfactory couple relationship, with specific focus on the close personal relationship of marriage.

Firstly, finding time to talk. Taking time to listen keeps the lines of communication open and improves marriage relationship. Couples need to take time to talk about their reactions and how they are perceived so they can develop a better understanding of each other's subtleties and nuances. Without sufficient time together, it is not possible to learn to communicate well with each other. Because time is difficult to come by, one should make a deliberate effort to make time for each other. The best way to do this is to set aside a regular time to talk about what is going on in one's lives at a moment and devote all attention while at it (Harold, 2001).

Secondly, there should be clarity in any couple's relationship to avoid confusion and misinterpretation. Couples need to consider the volume of their voice, their facial expression, body language and choice of words. For example, a couple may be saying something perfectly benign, but if he/she is shouting and frowning, it may be taken as an attack. The clearer the couple is, the more chances he will be properly understood. Many couples assume that their partners know their needs, feelings and opinions even though they have never actually been verbalized. This is wrong because the partners need to state their thoughts as clearly, honestly and positively as possible.

Thirdly, another step couple can take to avoid misunderstanding in marriage relationship includes the listener's focus. As a listener, there are precautions couple can take to ensure more effective communication. Couples are more likely to get the full measure of the speaker's intent when their focus is completely on the other person without distractions. An effective listener asks questions and reserves judgment until he fully understands what the other person is trying to convey. Eboni and Deborah (2010) argued that a good listener does more than just hear words; he interprets emotions, behaviours and responds appropriately.

Fourthly, to avoid being passive is another good strategy in marriage relationship. This means that when any of the partners has a complaint or want to discuss something with the other, he/she should not cross arms or turn to walk out on or from each other. Fields (2001) suggests that it is better to take a deep breath and calm down, no matter how uncomfortable a spouse makes one or the subject of discussion or if any conflict tends to make one nervous.

Linda (2010) opines that both speakers and listeners must pay attention to body language signals to achieve effective communication. Listeners should watch for inconsistencies in the words being spoken and the body language displayed. For example, if a partner says she is happy with a

decision but she is clenching her fists and pacing, she may not be telling the truth. There are many communication strategies among married couples which could not be exhausted here. Nevertheless, one can pin down the strategies into two major types of communication – verbal and non-verbal communication. Most part of individual communication or interactions are hidden in the non-verbal communication strategy. So couples should observe and embark on understanding both the non-verbal and verbal interactions between each other.

Theoretical Review

Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory falls under the symbolic interaction perspective. The theory predicts, explains, and describes when and why people reveal certain information about themselves to others. The social exchange theory uses Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) theory of interdependence. This theory states that relationships grow, develop, deteriorate, and dissolve as a consequence of an unfolding social-exchange process, which may be conceived as a bartering of rewards and costs both between the partners and between members of the partnership and others. Social exchange theory argues that, the major force in interpersonal relationships is the satisfaction of both people's self-interest. Theorists say self-interest is not necessarily a bad thing and that it can actually enhance relationships.

According to the theory, human interaction is like an economic transaction, in that you may seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs. One will reveal information about oneself when the cost-rewards ratio is acceptable to them. As long as rewards continue to outweigh costs, a couple will become increasingly intimate by sharing more and more personal information. The construct, that is, the concept of this theory include discloser, relational expectations, and perceived rewards or costs in the relationship. Levinger (1965, 1976) cited in Foss and Littlejohn (2008), discussed marital success as dependent on all the rewarding things within the relationship, such as emotional security and sexual fulfillment. He also argued that, marriages either succeed or fail based on the barriers to leave the relationship, like financial hardships, and the presence of alternative attractions, like infidelity. Levinger stated that, marriages will fail when the attractions of the partners lessen, the barriers to leave the spouses weak, and the alternatives outside of the relationship are appealing.

The relevance of the theory is that inter-ethnic marriages (or any other type of marriage) grow and develop or deteriorate and dissolve as a consequence of unfolding social-exchange processes (such as communication in the home) which can lead to successful or unsuccessful interactions.

Empirical Review

In a study on "Communication in Intercultural Marriages: Managing Cultural Differences and Conflict for Marital Satisfaction" conducted by Renalds, Tiffany G. (2011), the study investigated the phenomenon of intercultural marriages, particularly the unique internal and external elements that impact communication and conflict within intercultural marriages of varying lengths and the intercultural communication competencies utilized by spouses in intercultural marriages. The research focused on three questions: (1) Which internal and external factors impact the effectiveness of communication between spouses in intercultural marriages the most? (2) Which communication competencies do spouses in intercultural marriages develop in order to address cross-cultural differences? (3) How do spouses in intercultural marriages experience and deal with conflict within their intercultural marriages?

The study adopted the survey method as its research design. To select the members of the sample size, a mix of convenience and snowball sampling techniques was employed. Data was obtained employing semi-structured interviews. Extensive interviews were conducted with 18 individuals who were married to and living with a spouse who is culturally different. Couples were composed of one Asian spouse and one Caucasian American spouse.

Four main themes emerged from the interviews: three factors which impact communication, intercultural communication competencies. Results shed light on diverse variables which impact marital satisfaction. Spouses' level of intercultural communication competence greatly influences the communication in intimate dyads. Those who have had significant exposure to other cultures in their environment at home, school, or neighborhood seem to have increased communication competence which fosters marital satisfaction. Others represented in this study revealed that a paucity of intercultural communication competence is a catalyst for tension and conflict within intercultural marriages. Spouses acknowledged the challenges in their marriage as well as how it was personally advantageous. The study also uncovered additional knowledge about how intercultural couples create a new culture. This third culture allows dyads the opportunity to construct a unique culture, composed of the best qualities of two distinct cultures. The study, among others, suggested that it was feasible for individuals from diverse cultures who marry one another with the hope of enduring love to have marital satisfaction for a lifetime.

In another study on "Towards Successful Intercultural Relationships: The Initial Development and Validation of a Relational Cultural Intelligence Scale" conducted by Yile "Tom" Su (2022). In response to the rising public interest in understanding intercultural couples' relational experiences, particularly how couples respond to their differences in culture, he proposed a new construct – Relational Cultural Intelligence (RCI) – to describe an individual's ability to learn and apply cultural knowledge about oneself and their partner in a relationship. In this dissertation, Yile defines the construct of RCI and describes the development of a preliminary RCI scale. He conceptualizes RCI as a type of social intelligence, and it entails three essential intellectual dimensions – awareness, skills, and knowledge. A sample size 186 individuals who were self-identified in a current intercultural romantic relationship was adopted for the study. The findings of this study provided evidence for the validity and reliability of a three-factor scale with a total of 12 items. Findings also showed that RCI was related to important aspects of relational experiences such as relational stress, dyadic coping, commitment, and relationship satisfaction. Possible implications and future directions of RCI were discussed.

The study sample was comprised of 186 participants who were all age 21 and older and self-identified as being in an intercultural relationship that had lasted six months or longer. A cross-sectional study was proposed to test the research hypotheses. Facebook, Instagram, and other digital methods such as email to recruit participants using a snowball sampling method. Participants read and signed an informed consent via Qualtrics prior to completing the survey. Participants were compensated with an opportunity to enter a raffle for several \$25 digital gift cards upon completion of the survey. Four inclusionary criteria were applied to screen participants before participating in the study. The inclusionary criteria stated that 1) participants must be in an intercultural relationship, which is defined as a romantic relationship of two individuals with distinct socio-cultural backgrounds (e.g., national culture, ethnic/racial culture, religious culture), 2) participants have been in their current romantic relationship for more than six months, 3) participants need to be at least 21-years old (no upper age limit), and 4) participants need to have access to a computer and be able to read in English.

The study provided preliminary psychometric evidence for a novel concept, Relational Cultural Intelligence (RCI)—a person's ability to learn and apply cultural knowledge about themselves and partner in an intimate relationship. Building onto existing research on cultural competence, emotional intelligence, and cultural intelligence and how they facilitate successful social interactions, this study extended the exploration of cultural ability to an intimate setting where partners come from different cultural backgrounds. The study was able to show that RCI could function as a protective barrier to culture-related stress and challenges, specifically in an intercultural relationship. RCI was found to be associated with less relational stress, more dyadic coping, more commitment, and more relational satisfaction. Being one of the first known attempts to measure individual ability to learn and apply culture in an intimate relationship, it was recommended that future research was needed to test the validity and reliability of the initial RCI scale among various

populations, while other attempts to measure RCI were also encouraged. At the same time, other important research questions about RCI will need future research to address, such as how RCI develops, if RCI is stable over time, if RCI is independent to the relationship, whether it changes when switching romantic partners, and whether couples' RCI are related to one another. The study points to the need for future research to continue to address these questions.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out using the survey method. The survey was used in eliciting data from a focus group of respondents, who gave their views and opinions on the challenges of communication among inter-ethnic marriage families in Port Harcourt L.G.A, Rivers State. The population of this study comprised all married men, women and children (families) who were in interethnic families resident in Port Harcourt City L.G.A., Rivers State. With an annual projection increase of 2.5% over a period of 17 years, the population of the local government as at 2023 was put at 774,600 from the 2006 National Population Census figures put at 538,558 persons.

Based on the fact that the research has a similarly homogenous group (i.e. people married to other people outside their tribe), 10 participants were sufficient enough to cover all reasonable responses based on the principle of saturation. Therefore, a sample size of eighteen (18) respondents were used. They were selected by constituting them into three clusters of focus groups made up of six individual members each.

To select the members of the sample size, the purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed. The purposive sampling technique was used because the members selected had the same characteristics as other members of the population involved in interethnic marriages. Simple random sampling method was also used because the researcher approached those members that were easily accessible.

The instrument used for the study was the focus group discussion guide. The focus group discussion guide contained items structured in line with the research questions. The guide was framed in such a way to allow respondents to express themselves in their own way and in some cases provide examples or instances. The discussion was based on personal experiences of the respondents in their marriages/families. The primary source of data for this study was derived through the use of the focus group discussion. The focus group discussion was carried out with the aid of selected themes. Since the respondents were constituted into three clusters of focus groups made up of six members each, the focus group discussion was done on three occasions among the different groups on different dates over a period of three weeks, taking the respondents one group per week.

Focus Group Views Explanation

Research question 1: What modes of communication are used among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State?

According to the focus group discussions, the six (6) participants in Group A said the mode of communication they used is verbal communication (oral communication) through the use of English language. Similarly, the six (6) participants in Group B said the mode of communication they used is also verbal communication (oral communication) through the use of English language but few of them use native languages to call the children by name or to signal or call their attention for something. Also, the six (6) participants in Group C said the mode of communication they used in their marriages is also verbal communication (oral communication) through the use of English language. Native languages are hardly or never used with the children.

Research question 2: What is the communication effectiveness among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?

According to the focus group discussions, the six (6) participants in Group A said that they achieve communication effectiveness in their marriages through the use of communication

competence skills especially in the areas of greetings. Similarly, the six (6) participants in Group B also said they achieve communication effectiveness in their marriages through the use of communication competence skills by making efforts to learn some bits and pieces of their spouses' native languages especially by making a few expressions such as invitation to partake in meals and making apologies. Also, all the six (6) participants in Group C said they achieve communication effectiveness in their marriages by using communication competence skills such as adopting a make shift or neutral language such as the Pidgin English or interpreting what the discussions are all about in English language.

Research question 3: What are the barriers to effective communication among such interethnic couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?

According to the focus group discussions, the six (6) participants in Group A said that a major communication challenge or problem in their marriages is that of language barrier as some participants can understand some expressions in their spouses' languages but cannot reply or express themselves well in those languages. Similarly, the six (6) participants in Group B also said that the same communication challenge or problem in their marriages is language barrier because all that some of them could do in their spouses' languages is greeting. The same situation applies in Group C where the six (6) participants said that language barrier is the major communication challenge in their marriages because they cannot have any communication breakthrough with their children using their native languages except using English language.

Research question 4. What other communication strategies are employed by couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State to address their communication challenges for better relationship?

According to the responses, the six (6) participants in Group A said that the communication strategies employed in their marriages to address their communication challenges is creating room for dialogue. Similarly, the six (6) participants in Group B also said that they use dialogue to address their communication challenges. Some participants said that they create time to talk about their misunderstandings and participate actively in the dialogue in resolving their communication issues. The same situation applies in Group C where the six (6) participants added that apart from dialogue, they resolve their communication challenges by seeking clarification of the message being passed across when it is unclear what the other party is saying. Some of them said good listening skills help them to overcome many of the communication challenges in their marriages for better relationship.

Discussions of Findings

This section consists of the data results and discussion of findings. As noted earlier, about 10 participants would be sufficient enough to cover all reasonable responses. Nevertheless, there were eighteen (18) respondents in all. Below is the presentation of their contributions.

Research question 1. What modes of communication are used among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Discussions from six (6) participants in the three (3) focus groups show that they communicate in their various marriages through the use of English language. According to them, their communication in their various homes is generally verbal (oral) communication using English language. All the discussants said that they communicate with their spouses through the use of English language and some use the native languages of the men which tend to be the dominant native languages after English. The participants also communicate with their children through the use of English language. This finding agrees with Ndimele and Innocent (2006) that language is so important in any society for the purpose of communication and communality as it is any system employed in giving, transmitting, receiving, sharing, exchanging or hiding information. In marriage

homes, language is the medium of communication between husbands and wives on one hand, and parents and children on the other.

Spouses' native languages are hardly or never used with the children. Some participants only use their native languages to call the children by name and signal or call their attention to something. Most of the discussants say they are usually left out whenever their spouses are discussing with their people. For them to partake in such communication exchange, their spouses have to interpret what the discussions are all about to them.

Research question 2. What is the communication effectiveness among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?

According to some of the participants, the communication effectiveness among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in the area is made possible and usually achieved through the use of communication competences. The communication competences employed include making efforts to learn some bits and pieces of their spouses' native languages. This they do in the areas of greetings, a few expressions such as invitation to partake in meals and making apologies. Thus, they adapt to their spouses' languages to suit the communication context. Thus, they are able to achieve effective communication in their homes.

This finding is in line with Mongeau & Henningsen (2008) assertion about Altman and Taylor's social penetration theory that the stable stage which is the final stage of relationship formation, simply consists of continued expressions of open and personal types of interaction whereby the parties no longer have any reason or reasons to not adapt or want to adapt to each other's situation.

Lastly, another way the couples achieve communication effectiveness with their in-laws who are not educated is by adopting a make shift or neutral language such as Pidgin English. They also ask their spouses to interpret to them what the discussions are all about in some communication exchange with in-laws. The participants also engage in mixing with neighbours who speak other languages to learn their languages. This correlates with the assumptions of Relational Dialectics Theory by Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) that dialogue is simultaneously about unity as well as about individual's difference because it shows how the meanings within our conversations may be interpreted, understood, and of course misunderstood. That is why the creation and interpretations we find in people's communicative messages, when wrongly made, may create strains in their relationships.

Research question 3. What are the barriers to effective communication among such interethnic couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?

A major communication challenge or problem with couples of different ethnic background is language barrier. Some participants whose languages are a little closer to those of their spouses can understand some expressions but cannot reply. The second resultant challenge is that the couples find it difficult to express themselves well in those other languages than theirs. Greetings and a few expressions in spouses' native languages are all some of the participants could do. They even agreed that there will not be any communication breakthrough with their children using their native languages.

One of the findings here is that partners are usually excluded whenever their spouses are discussing with the in-laws using their native languages and they sometimes feel the issues being discussed are about them because they do not understand or speak the languages being used. It takes their spouses to interpret in English language what the discussions are all about to them. Some of them say that the meanings their spouses attach to some objects or actions (due to cultural inclinations) cause misunderstanding during communication with in-laws. No wonder Macionis (1997) asserts that culture is based on symbols and such symbols carry notable meanings recognized by people who share same culture. Sometimes, greetings in a particular way are considered disrespectful. This goes to support the definition of culture by Gudykunst (2004) that

culture is the rule for living and functioning in a society and such rules differ from culture to culture and need to be learned to be in a particular culture. This is because according to Corbin and White (2008), the more different an individual's cultural background is, the more different their styles of communication will be.

Research question 4. What other communication strategies are employed by couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State to address their communication challenges for better relationship?

Some of the discussants say that they create time to talk about their misunderstandings. When issues are left unattended to for a long time, they tend to escalate. They prefer that both parties should make themselves available for and participate actively in resolving their communication challenge through dialogue. This justifies Okah's (2002) declaration that communication is the most important of all our activities as it helps us to organize ourselves as a civilized society. The home becomes more organized and civilized when couples dialogue rather than engage in fights and fisticuffs over issues.

It was discovered that a communication strategy employed by couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State to address their communication challenges is seeking clarification of the message being passed across when it is unclear what the other party is saying. The discussants said that they asked questions about things their spouses said to avoid misinterpretation of the message. This finding buttresses the point by Drussel (2012) that the lack of skills to effectively communicate and resolve conflicts in a person may negatively affect behaviour and impair the ability to develop and maintain their relationships with other people. For that reason, it justifies Neuliep's (2009) warning that if there is a language barrier between the sender and receiver, the receiver should attempt to seek clarification and not try not to interpret the meanings of the message.

Lastly, the participants said that for every marriage to work, the two people involved must listen to each other. They said that the two persons cannot be talking at the same time. Good listening skills help to overcome many of the communication challenges in marriage generally. They said that it helps them to read accurately what is being said and also interpret correctly the non-verbal cues that their spouses display unintentionally. Even when certain things are not said, they say that they can decode them through careful attention. That position is the same with Eboni & Deborah (2010) submission that taking time to listen keeps the lines of communication open and improves marriage relationship.

CONCLUSION

The modes of communication used among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State in their various homes is generally verbal (oral) communication using the English language. Thus, in marriage homes, language still remains the medium of communication between husbands and wives on one hand, and parents and children on the other.

The communication effectiveness among couples in inter-ethnic marriages in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area is usually achieved by the use of communication competences which include making efforts to learn some bits and pieces of their spouses' native languages. This they do in the areas of greetings, a few expressions such as invitation to partake in meals and making apologies.

The barrier to effective communication among interethnic couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area is basically language barrier and there is usually no communication breakthrough with their children using native languages except by using English.

Other communication strategies employed by couples in inter-ethnic marriages in the area include creating time for dialogue about their misunderstandings and seeking clarification of the

message being passed across when it is unclear what the other party is saying. They also employ listening skills to help overcome many of the communication challenges in marriage generally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of English which is a foreign language is rampant in majority of the homes as the dominant language preferred by the couples in inter-ethnic marriages. Other Nigerian indigenous languages (especially the minority ones) are gradually being phased out. Couples in inter-ethnic marriages are therefore entreated to use the languages at home among their families in Nigeria in order to promote, preserve and sustain our indigenous languages.

Though the respondents did not say that minority languages in Nigeria can be promoted, preserved and sustained through government intervention, community participation, language policy formulation, use for educational purposes, these avenues and strategies should also be enlisted to help promote the minority languages. The various levels of schools should desist from placing emphasis on the use of English language to the detriment of native languages.

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