

## Effects of Communication Skills Training on Increasing Intimacy between Male Teachers and their Spouses: A Case Study in Baane City

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aimed at studying the effects of communication skills training in developing intimacy between male teachers and their spouses. The population of the study included all the male teachers employed at Ministry of Education in Baane province in the educational year 2008- 2009 as well as their spouses, who might have been employed or unemployed. The sample included 30 couples having been selected from among employees who volunteered to participate in the researcher's advertisement calling for participants who were inclined to attend sessions to gain skills to improve their marital intimacy. Participants were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups (15 couples in each group). The research design was experimental design with control groups, with communication skills training as the independent and intimacy as the dependent variables. Both groups were initially administered a pre-test; then the experimental group received the treatment and finally both groups were given a post-test. Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ) was used to collect data. Results obtained from descriptive statistics, covariance analysis, and two-way analysis of variance showed the positive effects of communication skills training on reducing intimacy-related problems and enhancing agreement, affection, truthfulness, and fulfillment of commitments in the experimental group in comparison to the control group. Meanwhile, results of two-way analysis of variance indicated neither main nor interaction effects between gender nor the five variables; meanwhile no interaction and main effects were seen in total intimacy score across genders.

**KEYWORDS:** Intimacy, Communication Skills, Marital Intimacy Questionnaire.

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### INTRODUCTION

The most important subsystem within a family is that of couples. Research has indicated the quality of the relationship between couples is the most considerable predictor of marital satisfaction and intimacy. During the process of interactive externalization (i.e. reaching at a specific trend for resolving marital issues) the couples reach at a series of regular and systematic interaction patterns, establishing a structure for their family (Minuchin 1974).

Intimacy is an interactional process with interrelated dimensions. It is based on recognition, understanding, acceptance, appreciation, empathy with one another's feelings, and admission of the spouse's unique worldview. Intimacy is a real human need which develops in the framework of the survival need for attachment. Development of enduring intimacy between couples requires that the relationship be based on a healthy and dynamic relationship, which in turn entails that the couples have deep mutual understanding, accept and respect each other, trust one another and be totally truthful in their relationship. The depth of the intimacy developed in a relationship depends on the couple's ability to express their thoughts, feelings, needs, desires, and wishes in a clear, correct, and effective manner. Therefore, learning the skills of an effective relationship is the first step in developing or increasing intimacy within a relationship. (Bagarozzi, 2001).

Research indicates couples with an open communication pattern (trait expressiveness) are more strongly committed to their family and experience more intimate interactions in comparison to those who give little attention to the efficiency of interactions within the family. (Miller et. al., 2003). As for the effects of communication skills training, Epstein and Jackson (1978) showed communication training improved the nature of dyadic interactions between couples and reduced disagreements between them significantly.

Most couples develop idealized perceptions of their spouse before getting married which are in line with their desires and fantasies, and which are more favorably imagined than would be expected based on the partner's objective traits. However, in no longer than when they start their marital lives, such pre-marriage idealizations and

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intimacies wane in the light of realized perceptions, bringing about distressed relationships and interactional conflicts.

This study focused on the effectiveness of communication skills training on the improvement of intimacy among male teachers and their partners, since it is well-understood either lack of intimacy and affection between partners or lack of adequate skills to express such affections are critical factors in the emergence of most marital conflicts and distresses.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of this research was to determine the effectiveness of group communication skills training on the improvement of intimacy between male teachers and their spouses in Baane City. Specifically, it sought to help partners develop intimacy through instruction of communication skills including active listening, attention and acceptance, creativity and sense of humor, support, internal control and dialogue-based problem solving, so as to enable them behave more confidently in the face of marital problems, manage their relationship with their partners more efficiently and hence, improve the quality of their marital life.

### **Research Hypotheses**

- 1- Communication skills training increases intimacy among male teachers and their partners;
- 1-1 Communication skills training reduces intimacy-related problems among male teachers and their partners;
- 1-2 Communication skills training increases consensus among male teachers and their partners;
- 1-3 Communication skills training increases affection between male teachers and their spouses;
- 1-4 Communication skills training increases tendency to be honest (authentic) among male teachers and their spouses;
- 1-5 Communication skills training increases adherence to commitments between male teachers and their spouses.

### **Population and sampling**

#### **Population**

Population of the study included all the male teachers employed at the Ministry of Education in Baane City in the educational year from september 2008 to september 2009 and their spouses, who might have been employed or unemployed.

#### **Sample and sampling Method**

The sample included 30 couples having been selected from among employees who volunteered to participate in the researcher's advertisement calling for participants who were inclined to attend sessions to gain skills to improve their marital intimacy. They were selected from among 100 male teachers and their partners who had volunteered to take part in the sessions. Using a screening scale, i.e. Intimacy Scale (Walker & Thompson, 1983), the researcher selected 30 couples with the lowest intimacy scores in that scale. Participants were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups (15 couples in each group). The experimental group received the treatment in group training sessions, while the control group received no training.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

This research was randomized control-group pretest-posttest in nature; with this research designs all the conditions are the same for both the experimental and control groups, with the exception that the experimental group is exposed to a treatment, whereas the control group is not.

In this study, both groups were given a pre-test under controlled conditions, then the experimental received the treatment and finally the post-test was given after a one-week interval.

### **Procedures**

Having administered the Intimacy Scale on the volunteer couples, 30 couples with the lowest scores on the scale were selected as the sample who were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups. A pre-test was administered to both groups, and then the experimental group was exposed to the 8-session (lasting 8 weeks with the duration of each session 90 minutes) intervention program; the control group received no training.

### **Instruments**

The instrument used in this study was Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ; Van den Broucke *et. al.*, 1995). It contains 56 items to be scored on a five-point Likert scale, producing scores on five factor-analytically derived dimensions: 1) intimacy Problems (lack of intimacy); 2) consensus (generally exemplifying cognitive and behavioral aspects of intimacy); 3) Openness, which also measures authenticity (i.e. individual dimensions of intimacy); 4)

affection and 5) commitment. The Cronbach's Alpha measures of reliability for the five factors were .78, .92, .80, .69 and .72 respectively. As for validity, a face validity measure was used: a number of psychology and counseling professors judged the questionnaire as an appropriate tool to measure couples' intimacy.

## RESULTS

**Hypothesis 1-** Communication skills training increases intimacy among male teachers and their partners;

To test the first hypothesis covariance analysis was used. First, Pre-test scores, as the confounding or covariate variable, were entered into the model. The dependent variable was the participants' post-test scores. Results of the analysis are presented in table 1.

Table 1: The results of covariance analysis test for total score in marital intimacy

	Sample size	pre-test mean	post-test mean	adjusted mean	F statistics	Degrees of freedom	Significant level
experimental groups	15	159.4333	220.7667	220.091	418.536	1.57	0.00
control groups	15	151.2	154.6667	155.342			

As table 1 shows there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test total scores of marital intimacy, with the adjusted mean being 220.091 and 155.342 for each respectively ( $F=418.536$ ;  $df=1.57$ ;  $P<0.01$ ) therefore, one can conclude communication skills training increases intimacy among male teachers and their partners.

**Hypothesis 2:** Communication skill training reduces intimacy-related problems among male teachers and their partners;

This hypothesis was tested using covariance analysis too. First, Pre-test scores, as the confounding or covariate variable, were entered into the model. The dependent variable was the participants' post-test scores in the "intimacy problems" sub-scale. Table 2 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 2: The results of covariance analysis for scores in "intimacy problems"

	Sample size	pre-test mean	post-test mean	adjusted mean	F statistics	Degrees of freedom	Significant level
experimental groups	15	44.0667	52.3333	52.382	35.13	1.57	0.00
control groups	15	46.3333	46.2333	46.184			

As table 2 shows there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test scores of intimacy problems, with the adjusted mean being 52.382 and 46.184 for each respectively ( $F=35.13$ ;  $df=1.57$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). That is to say communication skills training reduces intimacy problems among male teachers and their partners.

**Hypothesis 3:** Communication skills training increases consensus among male teachers and their partners;

This hypothesis was tested through covariance analysis. First, Pre-test scores, as the confounding or covariate variable, were entered into the model. The dependent variable was the participants' post-test scores in the "consensus" sub-scale. Table 3 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 3: The results of covariance analysis test in "consensus"

	Sample size	pre-test mean	post-test mean	adjusted mean	F statistics	Degrees of freedom	Significant level
experimental groups	15	33.7667	49	48.733	178.121	1.57	0.00
control groups	15	31.2	32.6	32.827			

As table 3 shows there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test scores of "consensus", with the adjusted mean being 48.733 and 32.827 for each respectively ( $F=178.121$ ;  $df=1.57$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). Therefore, it is concluded communication skills training increases consensus among male teachers and their partners.

**Hypothesis 4:** Communication skills training increases affection among male teachers and their partners.

This hypothesis was tested through covariance analysis. First, Pre-test scores, as the confounding or covariate variable, were entered into the model. The dependent variable was the participants' post-test scores in the "affection" sub-scale. Table 4 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 4: The results of covariance analysis test for the affection scores

	Sample size	pre-test mean	post-test mean	adjusted mean	F statistics	Degrees of freedom	Significant level
experimental groups	15	21.9333	34.4667	33.879	308.288	1.57	0.00
control groups	15	18.1	18.5	19.087			

As table 4 shows there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test scores of “affection”, with the adjusted mean being 33.879 and 190.087 for each respectively ( $F=308.288$ ;  $df=1.57$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). Therefore, it is concluded communication skills training increases affection among male teachers and their partners.

**Hypothesis 5:** Communication skills training increases tendency to be honest (authentic) among male teachers and their spouses;

This hypothesis was tested using covariance analysis too. First, Pre-test scores, as the confounding or covariate variable, were entered into the model. The dependent variable was the participants’ post-test scores in the “authenticity” sub-scale. Table 5 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 5: The results of covariance analysis test for the authenticity scores

	Sample size	pre-test mean	post-test mean	adjusted mean	F statistics	Degrees of freedom	Significant level
experimental groups	15	31.3333	45.3667	45.084	148.718	1.57	0.00
control groups	15	28.0667	29.8667	30.149			

As table 5 shows there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test scores of “authenticity”, with the adjusted mean being 45.084 and 30.149 for each respectively ( $F=148.718$ ;  $df=1.57$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). Therefore, it is concluded communication skills training increases authenticity among male teachers and their partners.

**Hypothesis 6:** Communication skills training increases commitment among male teachers and their partners;

Again this hypothesis was tested using covariance analysis. First, Pre-test scores, as the confounding or covariate variable, were entered into the model. The dependent variable was the participants’ post-test scores in the “commitment” sub-scale. Table 6 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 6: The results of covariance analysis test in commitment

	Sample size	pre-test mean	post-test mean	adjusted mean	F statistics	Degrees of freedom	Significant level
experimental groups	15	29.4	37.9333	37.912	166.463	1.57	0.00
control groups	15	29.2667	29.2	29.221			

As table 6 shows there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test scores of “commitment”, with the adjusted mean being 37.912 and 29.221 for each respectively ( $F=166.463$ ;  $df=1.57$ ;  $P<0.01$ ). Therefore, it is concluded communication skills training increases commitment among male teachers and their partners.

### Sub-Findings

Are there any gender differences between male and female participants regarding the effectiveness of communication scales training on either total score in the Intimacy Scale or each of its sub-scales?

Another finding of the study was the exploration of the main and interactive effects of gender and the participants’ group in both the five variables and total score. Results of Two-way analysis of variance to test the main and interactive effects of gender and participants’ group in the five variables and total score are presented in table 7.

Table 7: Results of two-way analysis of variance for the main and the interactive effects of participants’ gender and group in the five variables as well as in the total score

Variables	Group	Sum of Squares	Mean of Squares	F	Df	P-value
intimacy problems	Gender	7.350	7.350	0.162	1	0.689
	Group	105.017	1050.017	23.172	1	0.00
	Gender * Group	3.750	3.750	0.830	1	0.775
Consensus	Gender	18.150	18.150	0.416	1	0.521

	Group	2870.417	2870.417	65.850	1	0.00
	Gender * Group	7.350	7.350	0.169	1	0.683
Affection	Gender	50.400	50.400	0.346	1	0.559
	Group	2208.267	2208.267	141.297	1	0.00
	Gender * Group	8.067	8.067	0.516	1	0.475
	Gender	150	150	0.004	1	0.949
Authenticity	Group	2244.817	2244.817	60.780	1	0.00
	Gender * Group	25.350	25.350	0.686	1	0.411
	Gender	1.067	1.067	0.075	1	0.785
Commitment	Group	1109.400	1109.400	77.931	1	0.00
	Gender * Group	1.067	1.067	0.075	1	0.785
	Gender	1.067	1.067	0.004	1	0.953
Total Score Test	Group	50228.267	50228.267	165.143	1	0.00
	Gender * Group	166.667	166.667	0.548	1	0.462

As table 7 shows, the main effect of gender on intimacy problems was not significant ( $p=0.689$ ); However, the main effect of group on intimacy problems was significant ( $p=0.000$ ). The interactive effects of gender and group was not significant, either ( $p=0.775$ ).

The main effect of gender on “consensus” was not significant ( $p=0.521$ ); However, the main effect of group on “consensus” was significant ( $p=0.000$ ). The interactive effect of gender and group was not significant ( $p=0.683$ ).

The main effect of gender on “affection” was not significant ( $p=0.559$ ). However, the main effect of group on “affection” was significant ( $p=0.000$ ). In addition, the interactive effect of gender and group was not significant ( $p=0.475$ ).

The main effect of gender on authenticity was not significant ( $p=0.949$ ); However, the main effect of group on “affection” was significant ( $p=0.000$ ). In addition, the interactive effect of gender on group was not significant ( $p=0.411$ ).

The main effect of gender on “commitment” was not significant ( $p=0.785$ ); However, the main effect group on “affection” was significant ( $p=0.000$ ). The interactive effects of gender and group was not significant, either ( $p=0.785$ ).

The main effect of gender on the total score was not significant ( $p=0.953$ ). However, the main effect of group on “affection” was significant ( $p=0.000$ ). The interactive effects of gender and group was not significant, either ( $p=0.462$ ).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

**Hypothesis 1 -** Communication skills training increases intimacy among male teachers and their partners;

As presented in table 1, results indicated there was a significant difference ( $p\leq 0.01$  &  $F=418.536$ ) between couples who attended the communication skills sessions (the experimental group) and those who did not (the control group). Therefore the first hypothesis was confirmed; based on the results, one can conclude communication skills training positive may be useful in fostering intimacy between male teachers and their partners.

Findings of the first hypothesis are in line with that of Sprecher (2002) who considers communication as an essential requirement for establishing an intimate relationship and giving rise to adaptability among partners. Moreover, results of research by Halford et al. (2003) and Durana's (1997) both of which focused on the practical applications of communication skills training, demonstrated the effectiveness of such trainings in fostering and maintaining positive intimate relationships between couples.

In fact, communication skills training helps couples convey their messages more explicitly and hence, come to a deeper understanding of one another. Systematic practice with communication skills by couples would help them, through adding constructive habits into their behavioral repertoire, resort to constructive communication patterns in conflict situations instead of engaging in stress-inducing behaviors such as criticism, blaming, taunting and tongue-lashing language.

**Hypothesis 2:** Communication skill training reduces intimacy-related problems among male teachers and their partners;

Based on results presented in table 2, there was a significant difference ( $p\leq 0.01$ , and  $F=35.130$ ) between couples who attended the communication skills sessions (the experimental group) and those who did not (the control group). Therefore the second hypothesis was confirmed making it safe to conclude communication skills training had a positive effect on decreasing intimacy-related problems between male teachers and their spouses.

These results agree with findings from Markman et al.'s (1993) longitudinal study carried out on 39 couples. It showed communication skills training was influential in reducing marital problems such as conflicts and lack of intimacy. The results are also consistent with findings from Sanderson & Karetsky's (2002). According to their

findings, couples who attended communication skills training courses enjoyed more efficient relationships, were more easily able to reach agreement and experienced less serious conflicts; on the contrast, couples without these skills experienced higher levels of conflicts.

**Hypothesis 3:** Communication skills training increases consensus among male teachers and their partners;

According to table 3, there was a significant difference ( $p \leq 0.01$ , and  $F=178.121$ ) between experimental and control groups in terms of “consensus”; Therefore, the third hypothesis was also confirmed. That is to say, communication skills training had been effective in promoting consensus among couples of the experimental group.

Previous research has emphasized the importance of consensus between couples in the improvement of marital life; for example, Sherman (1993) found a positive association between marital communication and the degree of consensus among partners. Salas & Ketzenberger's (2004) also obtained results similar to the third hypothesis. Emphasizing the importance of communication in developing consensus and intimacy, they came to the conclusion that communication skills training fostered empathy, similarity, mutual understanding and, as a result, consensus among partners. Additionally, Heller & Wood (1998) demonstrated high intimacy is based on both understanding and similarity of intimate experience; In the meantime they stated mutual understanding was also an essential factor in intimacy and suggested therapists to focus on interventions to increase mutual understanding.

**Hypothesis 4:** Communication skills training increases affection among male teachers and their partners.

According to table 4, there was a significant difference ( $p \leq 0.01$ , and  $F=308.288$ ) between the couples who attended the communication skills sessions (the experimental group) and those who did not (the control group). Therefore the fourth hypothesis was confirmed; thus it can be concluded communication skills training has had a positive effect on enhancing affection between male teachers and their spouses.

The results of this hypothesis are consistent with Burleson & Denton (1997) who found positive relationships between constructive relationship and the ability to express one's demands and needs in the maintenance of affection between spouses. These findings also agree with Halford et. al. (2003). They also found that couples who took communication skills courses had more positive feelings toward one another, enjoyed more emotional support, and devoted more attention and care to their spouse.

**Hypothesis 5:** Communication skills training increases tendency to be honest (authentic) among male teachers and their spouses;

According to table 5, there was a significant difference ( $p \leq 0.01$ , and  $F=148.718$ ) between the couples who attended the communication skills sessions (the experimental group) and those who did not (the control group). Therefore the fifth research hypothesis was confirmed; thus one can conclude communication skills training has had a positive effect on enhancing truthfulness between male teachers and their spouses.

Regarding the fifth hypothesis, the researcher found no specific study to confirm the findings of the present research.

Marital truthfulness implies the spouses' mutual explicitness and love to express all their thoughts, feelings, needs, and demands. It implies the creation of a friendly environment where every family member can easily express their thoughts and feelings, listen to whatever they want, express their interests and secrets without any fear or threat, and pay deep respect to one another. Efficient communication skills training helps spouses treat one another more truthfully, and put more trust in another so that they can prevent fear, anxiety, and rejection.

**Hypothesis 6:** Communication skills training increases commitment among male teachers and their partners;

According to table 6, there was a significant difference ( $p \leq 0.01$ , and  $F=166.463$ ) between the couples who attended the communication skills sessions (the experimental group) and those who did not attend (the control group). Therefore the fifth research hypothesis was confirmed; based on these results it is safe to say communication skills training has had a positive effect on enhancing fulfillment of commitments between male teachers and their spouses.

Marital commitment refers to the spouses' conscious or unconscious built up image of love, and their commitment to maintain their relationship. Commitment implies a long-term decision to provide one's spouse with constant love, support, and care. Committed couples are those who decide to give major importance to their spouse, consider their spouse's needs as their own needs, have a sense of responsibility and truthfulness towards one another, are each other's companion in any conditions, show flexibility in all difficulties, consider their spouse's defects and wellness as those of their own, and always remain faithful to their relationship. Faithfulness to one's marital or any other intimate relationship refers to the positive and the negative forces that make him/her maintain his/her relationship. Having deep commitment to a relationship helps people stay together in the ups and downs. The positive forces of attraction are a determining factor in commitment. In case we love someone, and enjoy his/her partnership, we will positively affirm a commitment to maintain a relationship.

The hypothesis- related research findings were discussed in the previous section. Now it is time to discuss the results of the side findings.

As the results of table 7 show, there is no significant difference between men and women regarding the five factors (intimacy-related problems, agreement, affection, truthfulness, and fulfillment of commitments), as well as the total score. Thus, gender has no significant effect on the research variables. But group has a significant effect on all the research variables (intimacy-related problems, agreement, affection, truthfulness, and fulfillment of commitments) ( $p = 0/00$ ). The interactive effect of gender and group is not significant in none of the variables.

According to Burleson and Denton's (1997) research on communication skills principles and hypotheses on a group of couples, there is a direct correlation between communication skills and marital intimacy, with no correlation with gender. Helle and Wood (1998) showed that there is no difference between men and women regarding the growth of intimacy, the similarity of the intimacy experience, and interactive understanding; which is in compatibility with the results of this part of the present research.

## Conclusion

Considering the results of the present research, it can be concluded that communication skills training leads to the decrease of intimacy-related problems and the enhancement of agreement, affection, truthfulness, and fulfillment of commitments and generally the level of intimacy between spouses. It can prevent the potential marital problems, and revive the affection and intimacy of the first days of the married life to a great extent. In other words, communication skills training and its generalization to the other levels of marital and social life gives the spouses a clearer view of conflicts and problems of life.

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