

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN COUNSELLING FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MEDIATION IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the comparative effectiveness of traditional, modern, and hybrid conflict resolution approaches as mediation strategies in counselling. The study identified the most employed strategies, their distinct characteristics and applications across different types of conflicts. It also assessed the outcomes of these strategies, detailing on their effectiveness not only in resolving conflicts but also in maintaining a long-term peace. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting 100 participants from the population of a broad range of stakeholders involved in conflict resolution and mediation strategies in southwest Nigeria. The instrument for data collection is a researcher-designed questionnaire known as Counselling Strategies for Mediation and Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (COSMECRQ). The obtained data were analyzed with descriptive statistics. The findings of the study showed among others that the traditional methods, particularly those involving community elders and cultural customs, are highly valued due to their local legitimacy and effectiveness in resolving community-level disputes. Recommendations were made among others that there should be formal recognition and incorporation of traditional methods into official frameworks, that increased training for traditional leaders in modern mediation techniques be intensified, and that policy support for integrated approaches that address socio-economic and political root causes of conflicts be employed. This study contributed to the understanding of conflict resolution dynamics in Nigeria and provided actionable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars interested in developing more effective and culturally responsive conflict mediation strategies.

Keywords: Counselling Strategies, Conflict, Conflict resolution, and mediation

Introduction

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human relationships and social interactions. In Nigeria, a country characterized by its ethnic diversity, religious plurality, and complex socio-political landscape, conflicts are frequent and multifaceted (Bamidele, 2020). These conflicts range from

interpersonal disputes within families and communities to broader interethnic and interreligious tensions. The prevalence of such conflicts necessitates effective resolution and mediation strategies to foster peace and stability. Counselling for conflict resolution and mediation focuses on facilitating communication between conflicting parties to find mutually acceptable solutions. The goal is not only to resolve the immediate conflict but also to equip individuals with the skills to handle future disputes constructively (Omotosho et al., 2020). Effective conflict resolution and mediation strategies can significantly improve relationships, enhance personal growth, and foster a cooperative environment.

Effective conflict resolution and mediation strategies are critical for maintaining social harmony and preventing the escalation of disputes. Counselling plays a pivotal role in these processes by providing structured frameworks and therapeutic interventions that address the underlying issues causing conflicts. It has shown that well-implemented counselling strategies can lead to significant improvements in communication, understanding, and emotional regulation among conflicting parties (Jones, 2020; Smith & Brown, 2019).

The study aims to identify which approaches are most effective in achieving sustainable peace, client satisfaction, and improved relational outcomes. Understand these dynamics is essential for developing tailored interventions that resonate with Nigeria's cultural and societal norms, ultimately enhancing the practice of counselling and its impact on conflict resolution in the country.

According to Omotosho et al (2020), Nigeria an africa's most populous country, is a complex and diverse nation with over 250 ethnic groups and numerous religious affiliations. This rich diversity often gives rise to significant conflicts, which span communal, ethnic, religious, and political dimensions. The persistent and multifaceted nature of these conflicts presents substantial challenges to social cohesion and national stability:

1. *Ethnic and Communal Conflicts:* Nigeria has a long history of ethnic and communal violence, particularly in regions such as the Middle Belt and the Niger Delta. These conflicts often stem from historical grievances, competition for resources, and issues of land ownership. The lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms exacerbates these disputes, leading to cycles of violence and retaliation (Bamidele, 2020).
2. *Religious Tensions:* Religious conflict is another significant issue in Nigeria, particularly between the predominantly Muslim North and the mainly Christian South. These tensions are often fueled by political manipulation and socioeconomic inequalities. The inability to address these conflicts through dialogue and mediation has resulted in recurrent violent clashes, such as those seen in Jos and Kaduna (Jegade, 2019).
3. *Political and Electoral Violence:* Nigeria's political landscape is marked by intense competition and often violent contestation. Electoral processes are frequently marred by violence, fuelled by allegations of corruption, voter intimidation, and rigging. The failure to resolve political disputes through peaceful and democratic means undermines public

trust in the electoral process and the legitimacy of government institutions (Yusuf, 2019).

4. *Economic Disparities and Social Injustice:* Economic disparities and social injustices are critical underlying factors in many of Nigeria's conflicts. The unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities fuels resentment and frustration, particularly among marginalized communities. This economic dimension of conflict is often overlooked in mediation efforts, limiting the effectiveness of resolutions (Eneji & Agri, 2020).
5. *Insurgency and Security Challenges:* The rise of insurgent groups like Boko Haram in the Northeast has further complicated Nigeria's conflict landscape. These groups exploit social grievances and weak governance structures to perpetuate violence and instability. Traditional conflict resolution and mediation strategies struggle to address the complexities of insurgency, which requires comprehensive and multi-faceted approaches (Mallam, 2019).

Thus, the persistent and multifaceted nature of conflicts in Nigeria necessitates effective conflict resolution and mediation strategies. However, existing mechanisms often fail to address the root causes of conflicts, leading to recurrent cycles of violence and instability. To promote lasting peace and stability, there is a pressing need for innovative and context-specific approaches to conflict resolution and mediation in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict resolution and mediation are rooted in several theoretical frameworks that provide insight into the dynamics of conflicts and the methods for resolving them, the theories include: Conflict Theory, Human Needs Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Systems Theory. Conflict theory posits that societal structures and relationships are primarily shaped by power dynamics and conflicts of interest between groups. Originally rooted in the works of Karl Marx (1818-1883), who focused on class struggles, modern conflict theory has expanded to include a wide range of social conflicts, including those based on race, ethnicity, religion, and politics (Folger et al., 2021).

Conflict Theory in the Nigerian Context

Nigeria presents a complex environment for studying conflict due to its diverse ethnic, religious, and political landscape. Conflict theory is particularly useful in understanding the various conflicts that have plagued Nigeria and in developing effective resolution strategies.

Ethnic and Religious Conflicts

1. *Ethnic Diversity and Competition:* Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture and interests. Conflicts often arise from competition over political power and resources among these groups. Conflict theory helps explain how ethnic elites mobilize their groups to compete for control over the state and its resources (Omotosho et al., 2020).
2. *Religious Tensions:* Nigeria is divided between a predominantly Muslim North and a

Christian South, leading to frequent religious conflicts. These conflicts are often fuelled by perceived or real inequalities in political representation and economic opportunities. Understanding these tensions through the lens of conflict theory involves analyzing how religious identities are used to mobilize support and assert group interests (Adepeju-Fashina, 2023).

Political and Economic Conflicts

1. *Resource Control and Wealth Distribution:* The control of oil wealth has been a significant source of conflict, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Conflict theory highlights how the distribution of resources and economic benefits can exacerbate tensions between the federal government and local communities. Effective resolution requires addressing the structural issues of resource allocation and economic disparity (Owoeye & Ezeokoye, 2020).
2. *Political Power Struggles:* Nigerian politics is often characterized by intense power struggles and corruption. These struggles are explained by conflict theory as competing elites vie for control of the state apparatus to benefit their groups. Resolution strategies must therefore consider the political incentives and structures that perpetuate these power struggles (Olumuyiwa & Isaiah, 2023).

Conflict Resolution and Mediation Strategies

Applying conflict theory to conflict resolution in Nigeria involves several strategies:

1. *Transformative Mediation:* Focuses on empowering the conflicting parties and fostering mutual recognition and respect. This approach aligns with conflict theory by addressing power imbalances and encouraging meaningful dialogue (Nthontho, 2020).
2. *Structural Approaches:* These strategies aim to change the underlying structures that cause conflict. In Nigeria, this could involve reforms in resource distribution, political representation, and economic development policies (Onah et al., 2022).
3. *Community-Based Resolution:* Involving local communities and traditional leaders in conflict resolution can be effective, particularly in ethnically and religiously diverse societies. This approach respects local customs and provides a culturally relevant framework for resolving conflicts (Yimer, 2022).
4. *Hybrid Approaches:* Combining modern conflict resolution techniques with traditional practices can provide comprehensive solutions. This integration is crucial in societies where traditional systems still hold significant sway (Olademo et al., 2021).

Thus, conflict theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the complexities of conflict in societies like Nigeria. It emphasizes the importance of addressing power imbalances, structural inequalities, and diverse interests to achieve effective and lasting conflict resolution. Applying conflict theory to the Nigerian context, strategies can be developed that not only resolve conflicts but also promote sustainable peace and social progress.

Strategies for Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Several strategies are employed in conflict resolution and mediation counselling. These include:

- ◆ *Negotiation and Bargaining*: This strategy involves parties directly negotiating terms to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement. Effective negotiation requires clear communication, understanding of interests, and a willingness to compromise (Korobkin, 2024).
- ◆ *Conflict Coaching*: Conflict coaching is a one-on-one process where a coach helps an individual understand their conflict and develop strategies to manage it. This approach is particularly effective for personal development and empowering individuals to handle conflicts independently (Giacomini & Porter, 2023).
- ◆ *Facilitation and Dialogue*: Facilitation involves guiding discussions between conflicting parties to promote understanding and collaboration. It is often used in community or group settings where ongoing relationships are important (Folger et al., 2021).
- ◆ *Mindfulness and Stress Reduction*: Incorporating mindfulness techniques helps individuals manage their emotional responses to conflict. This strategy can reduce stress and promote a more balanced approach to conflict resolution (Kay & Skarlicki, 2020).
- ◆ *Conflict Mapping*: This technique involves creating a visual representation of the conflict, including key players, issues, and relationships. Conflict mapping helps parties gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved and identify potential solutions (Furlong, 2020).
- ◆ *Mediation Circles*: Mediation circles bring together all parties involved in a conflict to discuss the issue in a structured, facilitated setting. This method encourages open dialogue and collective problem-solving, often used in schools and community settings (Harmon-Darrow et al., 2020).

Comparative Analysis of Approaches and Outcomes

Different conflict resolution and mediation strategies offer unique advantages and face specific challenges. A comparative analysis reveals their relative effectiveness:

- ◆ *Dual Concern Theory vs. Social Constructionism*: Dual Concern Theory is particularly useful in workplace settings where balancing personal and organizational interests is crucial. It leads to pragmatic solutions that consider both self and others' concerns. Social Constructionism, on the other hand, is effective in more complex, relational conflicts, such as those in families or communities, where reshaping narratives can transform interactions (Ingram et al., 2019; Musenero et al., 2021).
- ◆ *Restorative Justice vs. Emotional Intelligence Theory*: Restorative justice is highly effective in contexts where repairing relationships and community harmony is paramount, such as in schools or criminal justice. Emotional Intelligence Theory is more applicable in personal or

professional settings where managing and understanding emotions can prevent conflicts from escalating (Wong & Gavrielides, 2019).

- ◆ *Negotiation and Bargaining vs. Conflict Coaching:* Negotiation is ideal for situations where clear agreements need to be reached, such as business or legal disputes. Conflict coaching is more suited for personal growth and empowering individuals to manage their conflicts, particularly in professional development settings (Malchanau et al., 2018).
- ◆ *Facilitation and Dialogue vs. Mindfulness and Stress Reduction:* Facilitation is crucial in group or community conflicts where ongoing relationships and collaboration are necessary. Mindfulness and stress reduction techniques are effective in individual conflicts where emotional regulation is key to resolving the issue (Folger et al., 2021).
- ◆ *Conflict Mapping vs. Mediation Circles:* Conflict mapping is useful for gaining a detailed understanding of complex disputes with multiple stakeholders, making it valuable in organizational or international conflicts. Mediation circles are more effective in community or educational settings where inclusive, collective problem-solving is required (Gray & Purdy, 2018).

Case Studies and Practical Outcomes

Practical applications of these strategies highlight their effectiveness in resolving different types of conflicts:

- ◆ *Organizational Conflict:* A corporate conflict between two departments over project responsibilities was addressed using the Dual Concern Theory. Focus on both departmental interests, the parties negotiated a compromise that balanced workload and responsibility, leading to improved interdepartmental cooperation (Folger et al., 2021).
- ◆ *Family Conflict:* In a case of ongoing family tension over care giving responsibilities, a social constructionist approach was employed. Assist the family members reframe their narratives and understand each other's perspectives, the counsellor facilitated a more empathetic and cooperative environment (Medved & Rawlins, 2011).
- ◆ *School Conflict:* A high school used restorative justice circles to address a series of bullying incidents. By involving students, parents, and staff in the dialogue, the school was able to repair relationships and create a more supportive community environment (Lodi et al., 2021).
- ◆ *Workplace Mediation:* Conflict coaching was used to help a manager navigate a contentious relationship with a team member. Through individual coaching sessions, the manager developed better communication and conflict management skills, leading to improved team dynamics (Raines, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is a pervasive issue in Nigeria, affecting various facets of society including

families, communities, workplaces, and even the political arena. Nigeria's diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural landscape often exacerbates tensions, leading to conflicts that can be both deep-rooted and widespread (Omotosho et al., 2020). Despite efforts to manage and resolve these conflicts, many persist or recur, indicating a need for more effective strategies. Counselling as a professional practice offers a range of strategies for conflict resolution and mediation, yet their effectiveness in the Nigerian context remains under-researched. The unique socio-cultural dynamics of Nigeria, such as communal living, extended family systems, and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, may influence the success of these strategies. Hence, the integration of culturally sensitive approaches in counselling practices is often lacking, which can lead to suboptimal outcomes. Hence study examined effective strategies in counselling for conflict resolution and mediation in southwest Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to:

- Examine the Diversity of Conflict Resolution and Mediation Strategies in Nigeria
- Evaluate the Effectiveness of Different Conflict Resolution and Mediation Strategies
- Identify Opportunities for Integrating Traditional and Modern Approaches to Address Conflict Root Causes

Research Questions

- What are the most employed conflict resolution and mediation strategies in Nigeria, and how do they vary across different types of conflicts (e.g., ethnic, religious, political, and economic)?
- How do the outcomes of different conflict resolution and mediation strategies compare in terms of their effectiveness in resolving conflicts and sustaining peace in Nigeria?
- What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of conflict resolution and mediation practices in Nigeria, particularly in integrating traditional and modern approaches to address the root causes of conflicts?

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was used, the population for this study includes a broad range of stakeholders involved in conflict resolution and mediation in southwest (Lagos and Ogun State) Nigeria. This encompasses: Community Leaders; Government Officials; Civil Society Organizations, Affected Communities, and Academics and Experts.

The sample size of 100 participants (50 individuals, 30 counsellors, 20 community leaders) were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using researcher designed questionnaire named Counselling Strategies for Mediation and Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (COSMECRQ) from a diverse sample of conflict resolution practitioners, community leaders, and affected individuals across Nigeria. The items were

designed using a four-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from Strongly Disagree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Agree which has four (4) points. Cronbach Alpha was used to measure of internal consistency for the instrument and value of $r = 0.92$ was obtained. The data from the structured questionnaires are analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate mean and standard deviations.

Results

This study is concerned with effective strategies in counselling for conflict resolution and mediation: a Comparative study of approaches and outcomes.

Research Question One: What are the most employed conflict resolution and mediation strategies in Nigeria, and how do they vary across different types of conflicts?

Table 1: Diversity of Conflict Resolution and Mediation Strategies

| S/N | ITEMS | X | SD | Remarks |
|---------------|--|-----|------|---------|
| 1 | Different conflict types in Nigeria (ethnic, religious, political, economic) require distinct conflict resolution strategies | 3.2 | 0.75 | Agreed |
| 2 | Traditional conflict resolution methods are still widely used in Nigerian communities | 3.5 | 0.60 | Agreed |
| 3 | Modern conflict resolution practices are often seen as more legitimate than traditional methods | 2.8 | 0.85 | Agreed |
| 4 | Community elders play a crucial role in resolving conflicts at the local level | 3.6 | 0.55 | Agreed |
| 5 | Government-led mediation efforts are more effective in resolving political conflicts | 2.9 | 0.80 | Agreed |
| 6 | NGOs and international organizations are vital in mediating religious conflicts in Nigeria | 3.1 | 0.70 | Agreed |
| 7 | Economic conflicts in Nigeria are best resolved through modern legal and negotiation frameworks | 3.0 | 0.65 | Agreed |
| 8 | Different regions in Nigeria prefer different conflict resolution approaches based on their cultural context | 3.3 | 0.72 | Agreed |
| Weighted Mean | | 3.2 | | |

The overall mean value of **3.2** which is greater than the cut-off means of 2.5 indicated that analysis provides insights into participants' views on the diversity and application of conflict resolution strategies in Nigeria, revealing areas of consensus and divergence.

Research Question Two: How do the outcomes of different conflict resolution and mediation strategies compare in terms of their effectiveness in resolving conflicts and sustaining peace in Nigeria?

Table 2: Effectiveness of Different Conflict Resolution and Mediation Strategies

| S/N | ITEMS | X | SD | Remarks |
|---------------|---|-----|------|----------|
| 1 | Traditional conflict resolution methods are effective in achieving lasting peace in local disputes | 3.4 | 0.62 | Positive |
| 2 | Modern conflict resolution strategies are more effective in handling large-scale conflicts | 3.1 | 0.68 | Positive |
| 3 | Mediation by community elders leads to faster resolution of conflicts | 3.5 | 0.58 | Positive |
| 4 | Government-led interventions are effective in preventing the recurrence of conflicts | 2.7 | 0.89 | Positive |
| 5 | Conflict resolution strategies employed by NGOs are effective in addressing humanitarian aspects of conflicts | 3.2 | 0.74 | Positive |
| 6 | Economic conflicts are best resolved through strategies involving financial negotiations and settlements | 3.3 | 0.67 | Positive |
| 7 | Religious conflicts require mediation approaches that involve inter-faith dialogues and mutual respect | 3.6 | 0.54 | Positive |
| 8 | Conflicts resolved through hybrid approaches (traditional and modern) are more sustainable | 3.4 | 0.60 | Positive |
| Weighted Mean | | 3.3 | | |

This provide insights into participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of various conflict resolution strategies in Nigeria, highlighting areas where traditional, modern approaches are seen as particularly effective.

Research Question Three: What recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of conflict resolution and mediation practices in Nigeria, particularly in integrating traditional and modern approaches to address the root causes of conflicts?

Table 3: Integrating Traditional and Modern Approaches to Address Conflict Root Causes

| S/N | ITEMS | X | SD | Remarks |
|---------------|---|-----|------|---------|
| 1 | Integrating traditional and modern approaches can lead to more effective conflict resolution | 3.5 | 0.63 | Agreed |
| 2 | Community-based traditional practices should be recognized and incorporated into formal conflict resolution frameworks | 3.4 | 0.68 | Agreed |
| 3 | Modern conflict resolution techniques can benefit from the inclusion of cultural traditions and norms | 3.3 | 0.66 | Agreed |
| 4 | Training traditional leaders in modern mediation techniques can improve conflict resolution outcomes | 3.6 | 0.58 | Agreed |
| 5 | Conflict resolution efforts should address socio-economic and political root causes to be effective | 3.7 | 0.55 | Agreed |
| 6 | Combining local knowledge with formal mediation processes can enhance the legitimacy of conflict resolution outcomes | 3.4 | 0.67 | Agreed |
| 7 | Peace building initiatives should include elements of both traditional customs and modern peace education | 3.5 | 0.64 | Agreed |
| 8 | Policy frameworks should support the integration of traditional conflict resolution practices into national peace building strategies | 3.3 | 0.69 | Agreed |
| Weighted Mean | | 3.5 | | |

This provide insights into participants' perceptions of the opportunities and challenges in integrating traditional and modern approaches to conflict resolution in Nigeria, highlighting areas where consensus exists and where further discussion or exploration may be needed.

Discussion of Findings

The finding emphasized on effective strategies in counselling for conflict resolution and mediation, Conflict resolution and mediation strategies in Nigeria are diverse and complex, reflecting the country's intricate social fabric and historical context. Nigeria, with its multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and socio-economically stratified society, adopts a range of strategies to address different types of conflicts: ethnic, religious, political, and economic.

Research question one was answered and collaborated with Jones (2020); Smith and Brown (2019) that effective conflict resolution and mediation strategies are essential for maintaining social harmony and preventing the escalation of disputes. Counselling plays a pivotal role in these processes by providing structured frameworks and therapeutic interventions that address the underlying issues causing conflicts. It has shown that well-implemented

counselling strategies can lead to significant improvements in communication, understanding, and emotional regulation among conflicting parties. It was agreed and supported by Yimer (2022) that involving local communities and traditional leaders in conflict resolution can be effective, particularly in ethnically and religiously diverse societies. This approach respects local customs and provides a culturally relevant framework for resolving conflicts.

Research question two, the effectiveness of conflict resolution and mediation strategies in Nigeria varies significantly across different contexts, conflict types, and localities. This analysis explores the comparative outcomes of these strategies in terms of their success in resolving conflicts and sustaining peace. It was supported and affirmed by Folger et al. (2021) that the outcomes of different conflict resolution and mediation strategies in Nigeria highlight the need for context-specific approaches. Traditional and community-based methods offer high effectiveness and sustainability for local conflicts, while institutional reforms and interfaith dialogue are crucial for broader, more systemic conflicts.

Research question three, in integrating traditional and modern approaches to address the root causes of conflicts. It was corroborated with the study of Olademo et al. (2021) that affirmed that combining modern conflict resolution techniques with traditional practices can provide comprehensive solutions. This integration is essential in societies where traditional systems still hold significant control.

Conclusion

This study focused on the effectiveness of various counselling strategies in conflict resolution and mediation. Nigeria adopts a range of conflict resolution and mediation strategies tailored to the specific nature of conflicts. While traditional and community-based approaches are prevalent in ethnic and religious conflicts, political and economic conflicts often require institutional and policy-driven solutions. The effectiveness of these strategies varies, and a multi-faceted approach that incorporates local knowledge, government intervention, and international support is essential for sustainable peace. The analysis of conflict resolution strategies in Nigeria highlights the importance of integrating traditional and modern approaches to address the diverse and complex nature of conflicts. Leverage the strengths of both systems, addressing root causes, and tailoring interventions to specific conflict types and regional contexts, Nigeria can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of its conflict resolution practices.

The outcomes of different conflict resolution and mediation strategies in Nigeria highlight the need for context-specific approaches. Traditional and community-based methods offer high effectiveness and sustainability for local conflicts, while institutional reforms and interfaith dialogue are necessary for broader, more systemic conflicts. A holistic approach that combines these strategies, tailored to the specific conflict type and context, is essential for achieving lasting peace in Nigeria. The success of these approaches depends on several factors, including the nature of the conflict, the willingness of parties to engage in the process, and the skill of the

mediator or counsellor. Effective communication, empathy, and a supportive environment are essential in facilitating resolution.

Recommendations

- ◆ **Training and Development:** Counsellors and mediators should receive comprehensive training in multiple conflict resolution strategies to effectively adapt their approach based on the unique dynamics of each situation.
- ◆ **Integration of Approaches:** Encourage practitioners to blend techniques from various methodologies, as this can provide a more holistic framework for resolving conflicts.
- ◆ **Promote Preventative Measures:** Encourage organizations and communities to adopt proactive conflict resolution training, equipping individuals with the skills needed to address conflicts before they escalate.

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