

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION COMPETENCE AMONG TRAINEE COUNSELLORS IN NASARAWA STATE UNIVERSITY KEFFI, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article focused on Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Conflict Resolution Competence among Trainee Counsellors in Nasarawa State University Keffi, Nigeria. The study is a descriptive survey. Two research questions were answered and hypothesis tested at 0.05 significance level. The total of fifty (50) postgraduate students in Nasarawa State University Keffi, constituted the population for the study. The entire population (25 males and 25 females) formed the sample for the study since it is not large to handle. An instrument titled; Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Competence Scale (EICRCS) was adapted and used for data collection. Its validity was 0.76 while reliability index was $\alpha = 0.81$ by Chronbach alpha. Inferential statistics was used. Findings revealed positive correlation between EI and conflict resolution competence, underscoring emotional intelligence as major competence in counselling practice. Thus, the study recommended that counsellor training programmes should emphasise developing emotional intelligence as a core competency, enabling counsellors to better manage their emotions and that of their clients hence, leading to improved conflict resolution and good therapeutic results.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution Competence, Trainee-Counsellors

Introduction

It is increasingly an indisputable truth that counsellors are indispensable in handling and resolving emotional difficulties such as conflict either involving them or other people in the society. The ability to handle or resolve conflict is however not automatic but could require trainee-counsellors to be intentional in practicing and developing such competences to stand proper chances of being helpful to self and the society. This becomes feasible when Counsellors are emotionally intelligent, as that is a tool for managing their own emotions, those of others, and displaying adaptive behaviours for directing their clients, whoever they may be.

Conflict could be a disagreement or clash between two or more parties who have incompatible goals, needs, or values. In the current complex world where conflicts abound and the struggles to tackling them become aptly necessary, emotional intelligence is assumed to serve as double-edged sword in resolving conflicts on one hand, at the same time avails counsellors the opportunities for personal growth and understanding. Conflicts arise in different forms, usually stemming from differences in perspectives, priorities and values, with underlying emotional triggers i.e., core issues that resonate personally with those involved (Mataac, 2023). This article focuses on understanding the conflict resolution competence among counsellors in relation to their emotional intelligence.

People have different styles they adopt in resolving conflicts. According to Huan and Yazdanifard (2012), conflict resolution strategies are the patterns of behaviour that people display when faced with conflicts. Some of the strategies include; collaboration, competition, compromising, avoidance, and accommodating (Shkēmbi & Treska, 2024). Several research evidence proof that emotional intelligence and conflict resolution are significantly related however, emotionally intelligent persons could any resolution styles depending on the trigger (Olderbak et al., 2018). This study however looks at conflict resolution as a whole and not categorized as mentioned earlier.

Tripathi (2016), sees emotional intelligence as competencies with which one responds to situations. It is useful in professional relationships, helps individuals navigate social interactions, resolve conflicts and make better decisions (Mafuzah, 2016). As opined by Serrat (2017), an emotionally intelligent person assesses personal strengths and weakness as well as those of other people. It could be inferred therefore that being emotionally intelligent brings about benefits such as better decision-making abilities, and better interpersonal relationships among others. These are very important skill set required of professional and trainee-counsellors especially in conflict resolution whether at personal, family, or societal levels in Nigeria and even globally.

Emotional intelligence can greatly advance counsellors' professional capabilities. It requires mastering different domains of emotional intelligence which Singh, Devi and Dev (2023) said include the ability to be; aware of self, self-regulating, self-motivating, empathic, and managing interpersonal relationships.

Self-awareness according to Mataac (2023), means knowing personal emotional strengths and weaknesses. Such knowledge enables people to set realistic goals and develop effective strategies for personal growth and development. With self-awareness skill, it could be insinuated that counsellors at all levels should experience; increase self-confidence, improved interpersonal relationships and overall wellbeing in professional practice. Individuals with high level of self-awareness are knowledgeable about and comfortable discussing their strengths and limitations, often expressing the desire for constructive feedback (Goleman, 2011).

Self-regulation or Self-management on the other hand involves establishing fair atmosphere by controlling self and others so as to achieve desired goals. Iwanna (2024) defined self-regulation as the capacity to manage emotion effectively without suppressing or ignoring personal feelings and those of others, but understanding, controlling and channeling them in healthy and productive way. A self-regulated person should be able to manage stress and other challenging emotions, express emotion in a constructive and appropriate way, and also avoid outburst and depression.

Another domain of emotional intelligence is Motivation. Mehta and Singh (2013) defined motivation as being free from interference. Self-motivated individuals are able to singlehandedly execute tasks successfully no matter the circumstances. They are resilient in setting and working towards goals with energy and self-driven enthusiasm, thereby transforming aspirations into tangible reality despite obstacles. Self-motivated counsellors most possibly to discharge their duties without feeling hindered by any circumstance.

The domain of empathy is the ability to share and be sensitivity to their feelings and responding compassionately with understanding. Kasik and Kumcağiz (2014) explained it as feeling with understanding, what others are going through. Possessing this skill will help counsellors to see things not just from their own perspective but also that of others hence, arriving at a more informed decision in the interest of those concerned.

The last domain has to do with social skills/relationships. People with social skills communicate excellently, build healthy relationships, and manage disputes effectively (Mehta & Singh, 2013). Counsellors should know to relate well with people because social skill is practically an exemplary and exceptional demonstration of the leader and counsellor that the world is looking for.

The measure of counsellors' level of emotional intelligence (high or low) therefore is the sum of his/her overall competence in manifesting suitable and effective outcomes. Hatice, Fatma, and Neslihan (2017) are of the opinion that counsellors would be considered emotionally intelligent if they recognise their emotional strengths and weaknesses. This determines the quality of services that counsellors are able to render in real life. Certainly, emotional intelligence is an indispensable quality that distinguishes good and exceptional counsellors because they are able to overcome challenges, and build strong relationship with people, and coaching those in similar situation.

High emotional intelligence levels are assumed to empower people to notice emotions in other people's speech, disposition or actions, and using the understanding in managing emotional and social problems as the case may be. Emotional intelligence is associated with higher professional successes (Sony & Mekoth, 2016), and show effective leadership styles (Edelman & Van Knippenberg, 2018). It also sets standards for conflict resolution (Shkēmbi & Treska, 2024), with it, counsellors are most likely to be effective in their professional conduct and practice.

Some researches revealed that the level of emotional intelligence in females is great than that of males (Patel, 2017), this is not consistent always as some studies may result in contrary outcomes (Naghavi & Redzuan, 2011; Rao & Komala, 2017). Similarly, Ali et al (2021) on comparison of emotional intelligence among university students revealed that males were highly emotionally intelligent than their female counterparts. On the contrary however, Shehzad and Mahmood (2013) observed that girls are perceived more emotionally sensitive than boys. Research conducted in Tamil Nadu, India, had female medical graduates being more emotionally intelligent (Chandra et al., 2017), and a similar trend was observed among Sri Lankan medical undergraduates, where females' mean scores on emotional intelligence were higher (Ranasinghe et al., 2017). In Delhi, among 10th graders, similar outcome was recorded about males and females (Joshi & Dutta, 2014). Interestingly, Amico and Geraci (2022) found no gender disparities in self-assessment, suggesting that boys and girls are equally adept at accurately assessing their own performance.

Emotional intelligence is said to set the standards for effective conflict management (Shkēmbi & Treska, 2024), this presumably even among counsellors in conflict resolution attempts. Significant relationship is revealed to exist between emotional intelligence level and effective conflict resolution (Kumari, 2015). A study conducted by Gnawali, (2016) on Conflict resolution and emotional intelligence among higher education students revealed that the relationship between self-awareness and conflict resolution is low. Notwithstanding, Shkēmbi and Treska (2024) are of the opinion that conflicts could be resolved if people learn to be emotionally intelligent because it is lack of it that affects conflict resolution competence. This article is therefore geared towards finding out whether or not trainee-counsellors are emotionally intelligent, and are competent in conflict resolution as they progress in their professional training because they are necessary for positive impact.

Statement of the Problem

Counsellors are presumed to be role models in many instances by the professional roles they play in the society. Aware of this general mind-set and expectations, counsellors may feel a sense of responsibility and obligation to control themselves emotionally even in the midst of unpleasant situations. Counsellors are able to successfully control self only if they understand, manage, and control their emotions including those of others, especially in the face of provocation like conflicts. Conflict is a state of disharmony between two people or group of

persons. Counsellors are sometimes seen as leaders, hence, the researchers presume that highly emotionally intelligent counsellors should have good conflict resolution competence with which to handle any situation that may arise whether involving self or other people in the society. It is based on this expectation that the researchers investigated the emotional intelligence and conflict resolution competence of trainee-counsellors in Nasarawa State University Keffi, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This study was geared towards finding out;

- (a) extent that trainee-counsellors are emotionally intelligent
- (b) gender difference in emotional intelligence among trainee counsellors
- (c) relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution competence among trainee-counsellors

Research Questions

These research questions guided the study:

- (a) How emotionally intelligent are trainee-counsellors?
- (b) What is the gender difference in emotional intelligence level among respondents?

Hypothesis

H₀₁: there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution competence among trainee-counsellors in Nasarawa State.

Methodology

This study is a Quantitative survey. A total of 50 postgraduate students (25 males and 25 females) of Nasarawa State University Keffi formed the population of the study. All 50 were randomly and conveniently considered as sample. Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Competence Scale (EICRCS) was adapted for data collection. It is a four-point scale with two parts. Part A elicited demographic characteristics of research participants and part B consists statements testing EI level of respondents (40 items), as well as conflict resolution competence (5 items) with responses rated from Always=4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2, and Not at all=1. The validity is 0.76, while the coefficient of reliability obtained using Cronbach Alpha is $\alpha = 0.81$.

Inferential statistics was employed. While mean score 2.50 was used as the bench mark for determining the EI level of participants, the value of 0.50 was used as a bench mark for determining correlation coefficient of variables where values below the bench mark are considered low and those above high.

Results

Research Question One: How emotionally intelligent are trainee-counsellors?

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the level of Emotionally Intelligence among respondents

Indices of EI	N	%	Mean	Std 6	Decision
Awareness skill	50	86%	3.42	2.97	HE
Social skill		81%	3.26	3.70	HE
Self-Management		74%	2.97	4.35	HE
Relationship skill		85%	3.41	3.02	HE
Aggregate Score		82%	3.27	3.51	HE

Scale: 1.00 – 1.49VLE, 1.50 -2.49LE, **2.50** – 3.49 HE, 3.50 – 5.00VHE

Table 1 revealed that respondents scored an aggregate mean of 3.27 and standard deviation of 3.51, indicating that trainee-counsellors in Nasarawa State are emotionally intelligent to a high extent.

Research Question 2: What is the gender difference in EI level among respondents?

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the difference in EI between Male & Female Respondents

Indices of EI	N	%	Male			Female			
			Mean	Std 6	Dec.	Mean	Std 6	Dec.	
Self-Awareness	50	84%	3.37	1.98	HE	87%	3.47	3.66	HE
Social Awareness		81%	3.24	4.13	HE	82%	3.27	3.30	HE
Self-Management		73%	2.92	4.17	HE	76%	3.02	4.56	HE
Relationship Man.		86%	3.45	2.25	HE	85%	3.39	3.60	HE
Aggregate Score			3.25	3.13	HE		3.27	3.78	HE

Scale: 2.50

Table 2 showed that both male and female trainee counsellors had high level of EI in different domains. However, the females had a slightly higher mean aggregate of 3.29 and standard deviation of 3.78, above their male counterparts who had mean aggregate of 3.25 and standard deviation of 3.13. Female participants ranked a bit higher than their male counterparts in all domains of EI, while male participants scored slightly top of their female counterparts only in relationship management domain with mean scores of 3.45 and 3.39 respectively.

Hypothesis

H0₁: There is no significant Relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution competence among trainee-counsellors

Table 3: Pearson Moment Correlation between EI and Conflict Resolution Competence

Variable	Emotional Intelligence	Conflict Resolution competence	
Emotional Intelligence	PPMC	1	.921**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	50	
Conflict Resolution competence	PPMC	.921**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	50	

** . Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In table 3, the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution competence among respondents is $r = 0.921$. This shows very high positive association between EI and Conflict Resolution competence.

Discussion of Findings

First, the study found that trainee-counsellors in Nasarawa State University Keffi are highly emotionally intelligent across all domains. With an aggregate mean score of 3.27, respondents showed strong capacity understanding their strength and weaknesses including those of others This finding aligns with existing literature that highlights emotional intelligence as a vital skill in counselling (Serrat, 2017). For counsellors, managing emotions is crucial in helping clients navigate their own emotional challenges. High emotional intelligence enables counsellors to maintain emotional stability and objectivity in emotionally charged situations, which is essential for providing effective therapeutic interventions (Carkhuff, 2009). Furthermore, the result supports previous research that suggests that trainee counsellors, particularly those undergoing professional development, are likely to develop a heightened sense of emotional awareness and regulation (Beck, 2011).

Secondly, this study revealed that the EI levels of male and female trainee counsellors are not different. Both male and female respondents exhibited high emotional intelligence, with women scoring marginally higher in self-awareness, social awareness, and self-management, while men scored slightly higher in relationship management. This is consistent with some prior studies that found no consistent pattern of EI superiority in either gender (Rao & Komala, 2017). While some research indicates that women may generally score higher on empathy and social skills (Chandra et al., 2017), other studies found men to be equally adept in areas such as self-awareness and regulation (Ali et al., 2021). The current finding suggests that emotional

intelligence could be a function of other factors like professional training and personal development, rather than gender alone. This result also challenges traditional gender stereotypes and emphasizes the need to focus on individual emotional competence rather than relying on generalized assumptions about gender differences.

The third finding revealed strong positive association ($r=0.921$) among EI and conflict resolution competence among trainee-counsellors. This finding indicates that as emotional intelligence increases, so does the ability to effectively manage and resolve conflicts. Emotional intelligence enhances conflict resolution competence in individuals, helping them to navigate challenges successfully. The finding aligns with Gnawali (2016) that Self-awareness allows counsellors to recognize their own emotional triggers, helping them remain calm and composed during conflicts. It similarly supports Kasik and Kumcağiz (2014) who hold that empathy enables counsellors to understand the perspectives and emotions of others, facilitating more compassionate and constructive conflict resolution. Additionally, emotionally intelligent counsellors are understood to manage their own emotions effectively, reducing the likelihood of personal conflicts in professional settings (Nwachukwu, 2017).

Implication for Counselling Practice

Emotional intelligence is no doubt paramount in counsellor-education/training and practice. Incorporating EI training into counsellor education helps counsellors better understand their strengths and weaknesses as well as those of others hence equipped to manage and resolve conflict competently. Additionally, the lack of significant gender differences in EI underscores the importance of providing equal opportunities for all trainees to build emotional competence through experiential learning and reflective practice. Given the prevalence of interpersonal conflicts in counselling, integrating conflict resolution competence through workshops and role-playing exercises will better equip counsellors to handle emotionally charged situations with compassion and effectiveness.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence is a viable tool that trainee- counsellors need to deliberately develop as they train because it will set them on effective path in counselling practice especially in terms of conflict resolution.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend that;

- Counsellor training programmes should emphasize developing emotional intelligence as a core competence requirement to enable trainee-counsellors opportunity to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and those of others as bases for effective conflict resolution
- Counsellor educators should provide equal opportunities for all trainees, regardless of gender, to develop emotional intelligence through experiential learning, reflective practice, and emotional awareness exercises, promoting emotional competence across the

board.

- Counsellor-educations programmes should incorporate conflict resolution competence through avenues like workshops, simulations, and role-playing exercises, enabling counsellors to effectively manage conflicts in emotionally charged situations and provide compassionate support to clients.

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