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DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND COUNSELLING: CURRENT REALITIES

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Abstract

This study delves into the important role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and ethics in educational dispute resolution and counselling, highlighting their impact on professional decision-making and organizational culture. Emotional Intelligence, which entails the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, is found to be indispensable for resolution of conflicts and fostering ethical behaviour in professional settings. Ethics, serving as a guide for discerning right from wrong, contributes immensely to building positive and sustainable educational environments. Through a conceptual framework supported by an extensive review of literature and data from reliable sources such as e-journals and databases. Empirical evidence, supported by scholars like Holian (2006) and Zaki (2018), shows that essential EI qualities particularly, self-awareness and empathy improve ethical decision-making and support fair conflict resolution. Professionals with high EI are more likely to consider various perspectives, adhere to moral standards, and display leadership attributes. The study further adopts a descriptive survey method to examine the prevalence and perception of EI among educators and counsellors in resolving school-based disputes. Data will be gathered on types of disputes encountered, common counselling strategies, and the practical application of EI in educational settings. Discoveries from the study offer deeper insights into current practices and provide recommendations for integrating EI training into professional development. Ultimately, the research advocates for EI as a foundational tool in fostering ethical, empathetic, and effective educational leadership and dispute resolution practices.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, ethics, educational dispute resolution, counselling, perceptions.

Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI), often referred to as emotional quotient, is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and those of others constructively. It is now widely acknowledged as a vital competency in educational dispute resolution and counselling, where empathy, emotional regulation, and ethical decision-making are crucial to fostering inclusive and emotionally supportive school environments (Chebykin, 2020). Emotional intelligence allows educators and counsellors to maneuver interpersonal dynamics, manage stress, communicate effectively, and settle conflicts with empathy and fairness.

accountability and appropriate conduct. When aligned with emotional intelligence, ethical principles contribute to trust, collaboration, and a positive institutional culture. Alferaih (2021) notes that emotionally intelligent individuals, those with high self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation are more likely to engage in ethical decision-making, improving staff morale, relationships, and professional outcomes in school settings. The post-COVID-19 era has further emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in managing emotional challenges and preventing unethical responses during uncertainty. Strengthening emotional intelligence among educators and counsellors is therefore essential for promoting resilience, inclusive leadership, and ethical behaviour in schools. Essential emotional intelligence components such as self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management are central to professional success.

Nevertheless, to avoid manipulative behaviour, emotional intelligence must be ethically grounded. Ethical conduct provides the framework that ensures emotional intelligence is applied with fairness and integrity, educators who combine emotional intelligence with ethical values are better able to support students, mediate conflict, and foster a culture of empathy, responsibility, and mutual respect within the school community. Current studies confirm a solid relationship between emotional intelligence and ethical behaviour. Alferaih (2021) discovered that emotional intelligence positively influences job satisfaction and professional conduct among educators. Goleman (1998) and Chebykin (2020) emphasize emotional intelligence's role in stress management, decision-making, and relationship-building. Holian (2006) and Zaki (2018) deliberate how self-awareness and empathy are predictors of ethical behaviour in schools. The review also identifies gaps in training programmes that often overlook emotional intelligence as a skill set essential for ethical leadership and conflict resolution. Effective counselling relationships, built on trust and authentic engagement, are more readily formed by higher-EI practitioners. In contexts like mediation and restorative approaches, facilitators with stronger emotional intelligence skills tend to facilitate apologies, repair, and compliance more effectively. Ayodele and Ekwoaba (2025) report that emotional intelligence significantly enhances classroom management among private secondary school teachers in Isolo LCDA, Lagos State, with recommendations for pre-service training modules (Ayodele & Ekwoaba, 2025), Daodu and Elegbede (2024) found that among professional school counsellors in Ojo LGA, Lagos State, emotional intelligence is not gendering significantly influenced career commitment (Daodu & Elegbede, 2024). Educational counselling is guided by ethical principles such as self-sufficiency, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, and fidelity (Kitchener, 1984), and is operationalized through professional codes like those of the American Counselling Association (ACA) and the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA).

These principles interact with legal mandates around informed consent (especially with minors), duty to report, confidentiality limitations, and safeguarding. Ethical decision-making frameworks (e.g., Rest, 1986; Forester-Miller & Davis, 1996) aid practitioners in navigating

dilemmas evaluating competing values, consulting peers, and documenting decisions. Cultural

and contextual factors, including power imbalances and collectivist norms, further complicate ethical practice, particularly concerning consent and confidentiality. In schools, counsellors and teachers repeatedly confront interpersonal disputes (student–student, student–teacher, parent–teacher). Emotional intelligence competencies in practitioners (empathic listening, emotional regulation, communicative clarity) facilitate de-escalation, improve therapeutic alliance, and increase the effectiveness of mediation and restorative practices (Mayer et al., 2004; CASEL, 2020). Empirical studies in school settings report that programmes teaching social-emotional skills reduce aggression, improve peer relations, and support conflict resolution (Durlak et al., 2011; CASEL reviews). Counselling outcomes engagement, trust, follow-through are consistently higher when counsellors demonstrate empathy and emotional attunement.

Statement of the Problem

Educational institutions are microcosms of society where disputes unavoidably arise among students, teachers (educators), administrators, and parents. In the Nigerian framework, these disputes often revolve around disciplinary actions, resource allocation, examination malpractice, bullying, and administrative decisions. Counsellors are entrusted with interceding in such conflicts, yet their effectiveness is increasingly being questioned due to two major factors:

- i. inadequate integration of emotional intelligence (EI) skills such as empathy, emotional regulation, and conflict de-escalation, and
- ii. recurring ethical lapses such as partiality, confidentiality breaches, and abuse of authority.

Generally, the literature highlights emotional intelligence and ethics as key predictors of successful dispute resolution (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 2006). However, empirical studies in Nigeria remain sparse, fragmented, and often descriptive, with little emphasis on how counsellors' emotional intelligence and ethical orientations interact to influence resolution outcomes (Okoye, 2021; Odukoya & Onuka, 2019). This lack of empirical grounding hinders the development of evidence-based frameworks for counsellors in educational settings.

Without meticulous inquiry into the current realities of emotional intelligence and ethics in educational dispute resolution, Nigerian schools risk perpetuating ineffective counselling practices that may intensify conflicts rather than resolve them. This research is therefore necessary to bridge theoretical gaps, provide empirical validation, and propose practical frameworks for counsellors in contemporary educational environments.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the role of emotional intelligence in educational dispute resolution.
2. To assess the influence of ethics in counselling practices.
3. To investigate current realities and challenges in integrating emotional intelligence and

4. To identify effective strategies for enhancing emotional intelligence and ethical conduct among educators and counsellors.

Purpose of the study

Fundamentally, this study is set out to examine current realities of emotional intelligence and ethics in educational dispute resolution and counselling using a descriptive survey method. It seeks to assess the prevalence of emotional intelligence competencies among educators, the common types of disputes experienced, and the strategies used in resolving them. Also to critically examine the current realities of emotional intelligence and ethics in educational dispute resolution and counselling within Nigerian schools. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Evaluate the degree to which counsellors employ emotional intelligence in resolving disputes.
2. Investigate the ethical principles that guide dispute resolution and counselling practices.
3. Determine the relationship between emotional intelligence competencies and effectiveness of dispute resolution.
4. Assess the interactive effects of emotional intelligence and ethics on counselling outcomes.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do counsellors in Nigeria educational institutions apply emotional intelligence in dispute resolution?
2. What ethical principles guide current counselling and dispute resolution practices in educational settings?
3. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence competencies and dispute resolution outcomes?
4. How do ethical practices influence the effectiveness of dispute resolution?

Research Hypotheses

1. **H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and dispute resolution effectiveness. **H₁₁:** There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and dispute resolution effectiveness.
2. **H₀₂:** Ethical practices do not significantly influence dispute resolution outcomes. **H₁₂:** Ethical practices significantly influence dispute resolution outcomes.
3. **H₀₃:** Emotional intelligence and ethics do not jointly predict effective dispute resolution. **H₁₃:** Emotional intelligence and ethics jointly predict effective dispute resolution.

Theoretical Review

The study is anchored on two theoretical perspectives:

1. Emotional Intelligence Theory (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995), which posits that competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation enhance interpersonal effectiveness.
2. Ethical Principles of Counselling (APA, 2017; Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2015), which stress autonomy, beneficence, justice, and fidelity as non-negotiable values in professional practice.

The study integrates these theories to develop a conceptual model positing that emotionally intelligent counsellors guided by ethical principles are more likely to achieve fair, sustainable dispute resolution.

Conceptual Review

The framework guiding this research integrates Daniel Goleman's EI model (1998) with Rest's Four-Component Model of Moral Behavior. Goleman identifies five key dimensions of emotional intelligence (EI): self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, as we as Emotional Intelligence Theory (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995, 2006). And Ethical Principles of Counselling (American Psychological Association [APA], 2017; Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2015). That the model draws upon. "Based on these theories and existing studies, the researcher developed a conceptual model linking emotional intelligence and ethics to effective dispute resolution in educational settings."

These align with ethical competencies required in school settings. Rest's model, which includes moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character, complements emotional intelligence by emphasizing the ethical dimensions of behaviour. Together, these frameworks underpin a holistic understanding of the emotional and moral capacities needed in educational leadership and counselling.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted. Data was collected from 200 respondents including secondary school counsellors, teachers, and administrators in Lagos State through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire measured emotional intelligence competencies, ethical decision-making tendencies, and dispute resolution strategies. Qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to complement quantitative data.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of approximately 200 respondents will be selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation across school types (public/private), gender, and years of professional experience. Stratification ensures that different groups within the population are

proportionally represented, thereby enhancing the generalizability of findings.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher will personally administer the questionnaire with the assistance of trained research assistants to ensure clarity and accurate responses. Respondents will be assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive survey (frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviation) to summarize responses. Inferential statistics such as the t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will be employed to determine significant differences in perceptions based on demographic variables (e.g., gender, school type, years of experience). The data will be analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0.

Results and Discussion: Findings show that respondents with higher emotional intelligence scores were more likely to engage in ethical conflict resolution strategies. Key emotional intelligence (EI) traits such as empathy and self-regulation were found to be critical in diffusing student-teacher and peer disputes. Educators who practiced active listening, empathy, and transparency fostered more inclusive and harmonious classroom environments. However, limited training in emotional intelligence and ethical leadership was reported, particularly in public school settings.

Ethical Implications in Counselling: Ethics in counselling is not just about confidentiality and informed consent but also about fairness, respect, and integrity. When counsellors apply emotional intelligence in ethical dilemmas, they are better positioned to navigate complex cases involving trauma, behavioural issues, or academic stress. Ethical behaviour, grounded in emotional awareness, supports trust and therapeutic alliance, which are central to effective counselling.

Current Practices and Perceptions: Survey data indicates that while awareness of emotional intelligence and ethics is high among school staff, application in real-world scenarios remains inconsistent.

Figure 1: Current Practices and Perceptions

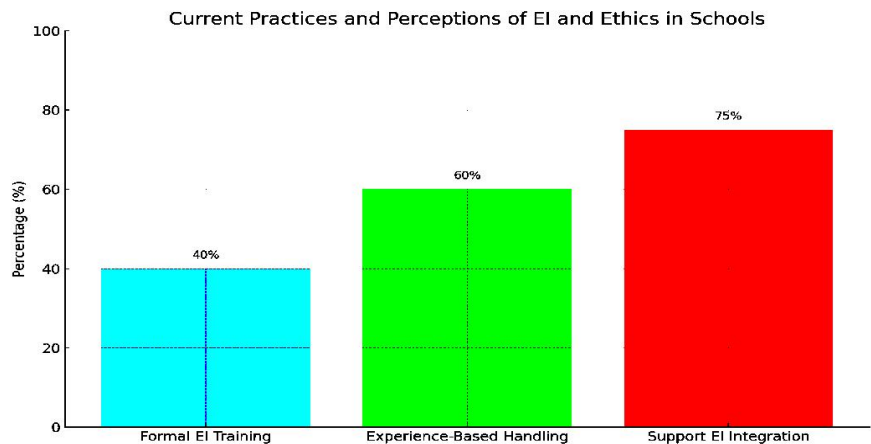


Figure 1 illustrates the survey findings on current practices and perceptions of emotional intelligence (EI) and ethics among school personnel. The data reveal that only 40% of educators

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have received formal training in emotional intelligence. Additionally, 60% of respondents reported relying primarily on personal experience rather than structured frameworks to address disputes, highlighting a gap in standardized practice. Furthermore, 75% of participants expressed strong support for the integration of EI into professional development programmes and ethical policy frameworks, suggesting a growing demand for systemic approaches to EI and ethics in educational settings.

Emotional Intelligence as a Catalyst for Ethical and Inclusive School Culture

In contemporary educational settings, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a key predictor of both academic success and social harmony. Students who are emotionally intelligent possess heightened self-awareness and empathy, enabling them to understand their own emotions as well as the emotions of others. This emotional attunement helps to validate another somebody's feelings and accept that their emotional states are separate from your own feeling. In this way, EI enhances individual motivation and equips them with strong interpersonal skills, fostering healthy communication with classmates and contributing to a positive, inclusive school environment. Emotionally intelligent students are better equipped to handle both success and failure with emotional resilience, reducing the likelihood of maladaptive behaviors such as aggression or avoidance. These students are not only more adept at managing interpersonal conflicts but also demonstrate ethical judgment, compassion, and a willingness to engage in difficult yet constructive conversations when issues arise. Similarly, emotionally intelligent educators serve as role models for effective emotional regulation and ethical behavior. They manage classroom stress more effectively, respond empathetically to both students and colleagues, and promote a safe and respectful learning environment. By understanding and managing their emotions, these educators transition from reactive to responsive behaviors, thereby diffusing tensions and enhancing collaborative problem-solving.

Moreover, cultivating emotional intelligence reduces emotional burnout and fosters ethical decision-making in both teachers and students. In high-stress educational climates where disputes are inevitable those with higher emotional skills are more likely to respond positively to risk, adversity, and conflict. As such, developing emotional intelligence is not just a personal asset but a strategic educational imperative that supports ethical behavior and sustained well-being in schools. Given these observations, the cultivation of emotional skills must be embedded within both student learning frameworks and teacher professional development. Doing so promotes self-regulation, ethical conduct, and positive school culture all of which are essential for effective educational dispute resolution and counselling practices in the 21st century.

Role of Emotional Intelligence in Educational Dispute Resolution

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a foundational competence in education, playing a vital role in fostering a supportive, inclusive, and emotionally safe school environment. Educators with high

motional intelligence manage stress better, respond empathetically to student behavior, and

resolve conflicts constructively. Students with strong EI communicate effectively, collaborate well with peers, and demonstrate resilience in challenging situations. In classrooms, EI encourages positive interactions, reduces conflict, and enhances social and emotional development. Goleman (1995) defines EI as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, skills essential for both teaching and learning. Educators with strong EI foster trust, model prosocial behavior, and de-escalate tensions, contributing to a respectful and inclusive school climate (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2004). For students, EI supports self-regulation, empathy, and coping with academic and social pressures (Petrides et al., 2016). Moreover, emotionally intelligent leadership promotes ethical culture and staff wellbeing. Thus, EI is not optional but central to effective education, dispute resolution, and institutional sustainability. Integrating EI training into teacher preparation and school counselling frameworks is critical for nurturing emotional wellness and ethical behavior in educational communities.

Identifying Emotional Intelligence Deficits

Individuals with low emotional intelligence (EI) often struggle with emotional regulation, leading to impulsive reactions and difficulty managing stress. They may misinterpret others' emotions, causing frequent misunderstandings and conflicts. Challenges include resistance to feedback, poor listening skills, and defensiveness, which hinder trust and effective communication. In educational and professional settings, low EI can weaken collaboration, obscure strengths, and strain relationships. These deficits may impact conflict resolution, ethical judgment, and overall performance. Recognizing and addressing such indicators is essential to fostering emotional growth and improving interpersonal and organizational effectiveness.

Strategies for Enhancing Emotional Intelligence

Improving emotional intelligence is a continuous process that involves intentional reflection and practice. The following strategies can help cultivate emotionally intelligent behaviors in educational and professional settings:

- ◆ **Engage in Self-Reflection:** Regularly assess your emotional responses to various situations to better understand personal triggers and behavior patterns.
- ◆ **Develop Clear Emotional Expression:** Strengthen your ability to articulate thoughts and feelings appropriately to improve communication and reduce misunderstandings.
- ◆ **Practice Empathetic Observation:** Pay close attention to the non-verbal cues and emotional expressions of others to enhance interpersonal awareness and responsiveness.
- ◆ **Evaluate the Impact of Your Actions:** Reflect on how your words and behaviors affect those around you. This fosters ethical awareness and encourages thoughtful, intentional actions.

Understanding Ethics and Its Role in Behavioural Regulation

Ethical values form the basis for distinguishing right from wrong and guide human behavior

with integrity and fairness. Morality, as a branch of philosophy, shapes individual conduct and

societal expectations. In organizations, promoting ethical behavior is essential to building trust, accountability, and sustainable success. In today's competitive and transparent environment, institutions must foster a strong ethical culture to avoid long-term reputational and operational damage. Emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to uphold ethical standards due to their self-awareness, empathy, and emotional control. These traits reduce the likelihood of unethical actions, even under pressure. When combined, emotional intelligence and ethical behaviour enhance personal responsibility, workplace relationships, and institutional credibility. Prioritizing both competencies allows individuals and organizations, particularly in educational settings to navigate challenges ethically and effectively while promoting a culture of fairness, respect, and social responsibility.

Ethical Behaviour and the Role of Emotional Intelligence

In recent years, unethical behaviour has become increasingly common across sectors, including education, raising concerns about its impact on organizational performance and individual outcomes. Ethical conduct enhances trust, accountability, and productivity, while unethical practices often rooted in negligence, self-interest, or distorted beliefs, undermine public trust and long-term success. Research highlights the need to understand and address the root causes of such behavior, advocating for the integration of emotional intelligence (EI) as a solution.

Emotional intelligence, characterized by self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, plays a vital role in fostering ethical behavior. Emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to handle moral dilemmas, act with integrity, and cultivate respectful, responsible relationships. Orme and Ashton (2003) identify ethics as a foundational competency, suggesting it can be developed alongside EI. This connection promotes internal motivation, consistent moral actions, and constructive emotional expression. Despite its importance, ethics is often neglected in the workplace, with many organizations responding to unethical incidents only after damage occurs. A proactive approach that emphasizes ethical training, emotional intelligence development, and strong leadership is essential. Organizations that prioritize EI create environments where ethical behavior becomes habitual, reducing conflict and enhancing team cohesion. Changing distorted perceptions such as believing unethical behavior is necessary for survival requires targeted educational and policy interventions. Ultimately, fostering EI within institutions can transform workplace culture, leading to more ethical decision-making, higher staff morale, and sustainable organizational success. This study emphasizes the strategic role of emotional intelligence in building ethical resilience and integrity in educational and professional settings.

How to Learn Ethics

Ethical knowledge is a complex field involving both theory and practice. Maintaining moral

values in academic and professional environments is essential, as compromised ethics can lead to

poor behavior, team conflict, and weakened collaboration. While there's ongoing debate about whether ethical behavior can be taught, traditional education often emphasizes logic and critical thinking over emotional and moral understanding. This cognitive focus may neglect the importance of empathy and moral reflection.

For ethics education to be truly effective, it must promote values such as honesty, discernment, and courage. Integrating emotional intelligence (EI) is vital in this process. EI helps individuals apply ethical reasoning in real-world situations through enhanced empathy, self-regulation, and social awareness. As a result, they are more likely to act with integrity and improve organizational culture. Ethics education should, therefore, combine theoretical learning with emotional development, empowering individuals to make principled decisions and handle complex interpersonal challenges responsibly and effectively.

Counselling implication

The implications for educators, counsellors, and school leaders are profound. Integrating emotional intelligence (EI) into curricula and professional development fosters core ethical values like empathy, fairness, and responsibility. Emotionally intelligent educators and students contribute to better conflict resolution, inclusivity, and collaboration. Building emotionally intelligent school cultures also enhances job satisfaction, reduces burnout, and supports sustained ethical behaviour. Therefore, emotional intelligence should be prioritized as a key leadership and counselling competency. Future research should explore its application across varied educational and cultural contexts. Ultimately, cultivating emotional intelligence is essential for ethical leadership, effective dispute resolution, and long-term institutional growth and success in education.

Conclusion

This study explored the critical role of Emotional Intelligence as foundational to effective educational dispute resolution and counselling. Individuals with high EI marked by empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation are better equipped to make ethical decisions and handle complex interpersonal challenges. These competencies foster accountability, respect, and integrity in educational environments. The study highlights the interdependence of EI and ethics, showing their combined impact on institutional performance and learner outcomes. To build resilient and inclusive school cultures, educational institutions must prioritize EI development and ethical training. This strategic focus will enhance leadership, strengthen student support systems, and contribute to long-term success in both educational and professional contexts.

Suggestion:

- a. Incorporate emotional intelligence training into teachers' education and professional development.

- b. Develop national ethical standards for school counsellors that emphasize emotional

competence.

- c. Promote school-wide awareness programs on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution.
- d. Encourage participatory leadership and youth-led initiatives like "Right Here".
- e. Design counselling curricula that balance cognitive strategies with emotional literacy.

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