

EFFECT OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING ON COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AMONG NEWLY MARRIED ADULTS IN KEFFI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF NASARAWA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of conflict resolution training on the communication patterns of newly married adults in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design was adopted, involving 40 purposively selected married adults (20 experimental and 20 control) within the first five years of marriage. Instruments used for data collection included the Marital Communication Patterns Questionnaire (MCPQ), Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI), and Participant Reflection Journals. The intervention covered active listening, emotion-focused communication, de-escalation techniques, and joint problem-solving over a six-week period. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired t-tests, and thematic analysis. The findings revealed significant improvements in constructive communication among participants in the experimental group. The study highlights the value of early conflict resolution training in promoting healthy marital communication and provides implications for counselling practice.

Key words: Conflict, Conflict Resolution Training, Newly Married, Communication Patterns

Introduction

Marriage is a close interpersonal relationship in which partners regularly interact and negotiate differences in values, expectations, and roles. Because of this continuous interaction, disagreements and conflicts are inevitable in marital relationships. However, the manner in which couples communicate and manage such conflicts plays a crucial role in determining the quality and stability of the relationship.

Research has shown that couples who adopt positive communication patterns such as active listening, empathy, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving tend to experience lower levels of marital distress and higher relationship satisfaction. Conversely, negative communication behaviours such as criticism, withdrawal, and hostility often escalate conflicts and weaken marital bonds (Apostolou, et al., 2025; Vijayan, 2024). Furthermore, contemporary relationship research emphasizes that conflict itself is not necessarily harmful to marriage; rather, the skills couples use to address disagreements determine whether conflict leads to relationship growth or deterioration. When conflicts are handled constructively, they can promote understanding, emotional closeness, and improved communication between partners (Msughter, et al., 2024).

Marital relationships, particularly in the early years, are often characterized by a critical period of adjustment during which couples navigate the complexities of emotional bonding, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Communication plays a central role in determining the quality and durability of these relationships. Effective communication not only fosters intimacy but also provides a foundation for constructive conflict management. However, for many newly married couples, this foundational skill is underdeveloped, making them vulnerable to escalating disputes that could lead to dissatisfaction or even separation (Gottman & Silver, 2015). In Nigeria, and particularly in the Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, anecdotal and clinical reports suggest a rising incidence of marital discord among young couples, often linked to poor communication and unresolved conflict.

The early years of marriage are formative in shaping lifelong relationship patterns. Couples must learn to manage differences, negotiate roles, and balance expectations with reality. Conflict, though inevitable, need not be destructive; rather, it presents opportunities for growth if managed effectively (Halford, 2011). Many newly married couples often draw guidance for marital interaction and conflict management from cultural values, family traditions, and community experiences. Such inherited wisdom can provide useful insights that help couples navigate early marital adjustments. However, in contemporary society where marital roles and expectations continue to evolve, some couples may not receive structured guidance on effective interpersonal conflict resolution. Consequently, while traditional approaches remain valuable, research suggests that couples who acquire deliberate communication and conflict-management skills such as active listening, emotional regulation, and collaborative problem-solving tend to demonstrate healthier communication patterns and greater marital satisfaction. Empirical studies have shown that effective communication skills training and constructive conflict resolution strategies significantly enhance marital adjustment and relationship stability among couples (Alipour et al., 2020; Akin & Kaya, 2022; Shifaw, 2024).

In this context, the development of structured, evidence-based interventions to enhance couples' communication and conflict management is of urgent importance. Conflict resolution training, with its focus on skills such as active listening, assertiveness, emotional regulation, and collaborative problem-solving, has shown promise in other settings (Cummings & Schatz, 2012).

However, such interventions remain underutilized in sub-Saharan Africa, where marital counseling often takes a reactive rather than preventive approach.

Communication in marriage is often conceptualized along a continuum ranging from constructive to destructive interaction patterns. Constructive communication involves behaviours such as empathy, active listening, affirmation, and collaborative problem-solving, which foster emotional connection and enhance marital satisfaction among couples. Empirical research indicates that constructive communication patterns strengthen intimacy, trust, and effective conflict resolution, thereby contributing significantly to the stability and quality of marital relationships (Righetti, et al., 2022; Shifaw, 2024).

Conversely, destructive communication patterns include behaviours such as criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. These negative interaction styles undermine emotional intimacy, escalate conflicts, and are strongly associated with marital dissatisfaction and relationship instability. Studies on marital interaction patterns have shown that persistent use of these negative behaviours significantly predicts relational distress and breakdown in intimate relationships (Kostić et al., 2022; Cordonnier, 2022).

Conflict resolution training is grounded in social learning and cognitive-behavioral theories, which posit that individuals can acquire new interpersonal skills through modeling, rehearsal, and feedback (Bandura, 1977). When applied in marital contexts, such training has the potential to disrupt negative communication cycles and promote adaptive interaction patterns. The conceptual tools of communication pattern theory and emotional regulation also inform this study, underscoring the dynamic interplay between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses in marital conflict.

Empirical research continues to demonstrate a strong association between communication patterns and marital satisfaction. Recent studies indicate that the quality of communication between partners significantly predicts relationship satisfaction, emotional adjustment, and overall marital stability. For instance, a study by Weber, Lavner, and Beach (2023) found that variations in couples' communication quality were closely associated with levels of relationship satisfaction and relational functioning. Similarly, Shifaw (2024) reported that constructive communication plays a moderating role in the relationship between conflict resolution strategies and marital satisfaction among married individuals. In addition, intervention-based studies have shown that structured couple-focused therapeutic approaches and relationship education programs can significantly improve constructive communication patterns and marital adjustment among couples (Salimi et al., 2024; Jiao et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the importance of communication skill development in strengthening marital relationships and reducing relational distress.

In Africa, limited studies have evaluated structured marital interventions. A study by Ajayi and Falaye (2020) in southwestern Nigeria revealed that communication-focused counseling

significantly enhanced marital satisfaction among couples, but it did not assess long-term behavioral change. Another study by Egenti and Onwuasoanya (2021) showed that assertiveness training reduced verbal aggression among young couples, yet the study lacked a control group, limiting causal inference.

Despite the growing interest in relationship education, available literature suggests that certain gaps may still exist, particularly within the Nigerian context. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, relatively limited attention has been given to rigorously designed, theory-based interventions specifically targeting newly married couples. In addition, few studies appear to have employed quasi-experimental designs that combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate the outcomes of such interventions. Furthermore, many existing studies do not clearly compare intervention outcomes with those of a control group, which may limit the ability to attribute observed improvements specifically to the training programme. This study addresses these gaps by implementing a six-week, empirically grounded conflict resolution training for newly married couples in Keffi LGA. It adopts a quasi-experimental design with both pre-test and post-test measures and includes a control group for comparison. The use of both standardized instruments and qualitative participant reflections ensures a comprehensive assessment of communication changes.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the widely acknowledged importance of effective communication in marital stability, many newly married couples in Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State still employ poor conflict management and ineffective communication patterns. These challenges often stem from a lack of formal training in constructive dialogue, emotional regulation, and collaborative problem-solving. While marital counselling services exist, they are often reactive, limited in reach, or culturally misaligned, leaving couples ill-equipped to navigate early relational conflicts. Existing empirical studies have primarily focused on general marital satisfaction, with limited emphasis on structured conflict resolution interventions targeting newlyweds. Moreover, there is a lack of localized evidence assessing the efficacy of such interventions in improving communication outcomes. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining the effect of conflict resolution training on the communication patterns of newly married couples in Keffi LGA, with the aim of promoting healthier, more constructive marital interactions.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine the existing communication patterns of newly married couples prior to participation in conflict resolution training.
2. Determine the effect of conflict resolution training on the communication patterns of newly married couples.

3. Compare the communication patterns of newly married couples in the experimental group with those in the control group after the intervention.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the communication patterns of newly married couples prior to participation in conflict resolution training?
2. What effect does conflict resolution training have on the communication patterns of newly married couples?
3. What is the difference between the communication patterns of newly married couples in the experimental group and those in the control group after the intervention?

Statement of Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the communication patterns of newly married couples before and after participation in conflict resolution training.
2. There is no significant difference in the communication patterns of newly married couples in the experimental group and those in the control group after the intervention.

Methodology

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group design to examine the influence of conflict resolution training on the communication patterns of newly married couples in Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised newly married couples who had been married for not more than five years and were residing within the study area. A sample of 40 married adults was purposively selected based on their marital duration and willingness to participate in the study. The participants were randomly assigned into two groups: an experimental group consisting of 20 participants who received conflict resolution training and a control group consisting of 20 participants who did not receive the training during the study period.

Data for the study were collected using the Marital Communication Patterns Questionnaire (MCPQ), which was designed to assess various aspects of marital communication such as active listening, empathy, collaborative problem-solving, criticism, defensiveness, and withdrawal. The instrument employed a Likert-type response format to enable participants to indicate the extent to which the statements described their communication behaviours. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in the department of Guidance and Counselling to ensure its relevance and clarity. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method, which yielded a coefficient of 0.78, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Prior to the intervention, participants in both the experimental and control groups completed the pre-test to determine their baseline communication patterns. The experimental group

subsequently participated in a structured conflict resolution training programme lasting six weeks, during which they were exposed to skills such as effective communication, emotional regulation, active listening, and collaborative conflict management, while the control group did not receive the training during this period. At the end of the training programme, both groups completed the post-test using the same instrument.

Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test were used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Communication Patterns of Newly Married Couples Before Participation in Conflict Resolution Training

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental Group	20	42.15	5.21
Control Group	20	41.80	5.34

Table 1 shows the baseline communication patterns of participants prior to the intervention. The mean scores of the experimental group ($M = 42.15$) and the control group ($M = 41.80$) indicate that both groups had relatively similar communication patterns before the training.

Table 2: Paired Sample t-test Showing Difference in Communication Patterns of Newly Married Couples Before and After Conflict Resolution Training (Experimental Group)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	df	Sig. (p)
Pre-test	20	42.15	5.21	6.84	19	0.000
Post-test	20	55.40	4.62			

Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference in the communication patterns of newly married couples before and after participation in conflict resolution training. This suggests that the training programme improved the communication patterns of participants in the experimental group.

Table 3: *Independent Sample t-test Showing Difference Between Experimental and Control Groups After Intervention*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	df	Sig. (p)
Experimental Group	20	55.40	4.62	7.21	38	0.000
Control Group	20	43.10	5.12			

Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference between the communication patterns of newly married couples in the experimental and control groups after the intervention. This indicates that conflict resolution training had a positive effect on the communication patterns of the participants.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed important insights into the communication patterns of newly married couples and the influence of conflict resolution training on marital communication. The discussion is organized according to the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

The first finding of the study revealed that newly married couples demonstrated varying communication patterns prior to participation in the conflict resolution training programme. The baseline result indicated that the communication patterns of participants in both the experimental and control groups were relatively similar before the intervention. This suggests that newly married couples may initially rely on personal experiences, family traditions, or informal interaction patterns when handling marital disagreements. While such inherited communication patterns may provide useful guidance in some situations, they may not always adequately equip couples with the skills required to manage complex interpersonal conflicts in marriage. This observation supports the view that marital communication plays a critical role in shaping the quality and stability of intimate relationships. Recent empirical studies have emphasized that effective communication serves as a central mechanism through which couples manage disagreements and sustain marital satisfaction. For example, Shifaw (2024) found that marital communication significantly moderates the relationship between conflict resolution strategies and marital satisfaction, highlighting communication as a key factor in maintaining healthy marital relationships.

The second finding of the study showed that conflict resolution training had a significant positive effect on the communication patterns of newly married couples in the experimental group. The results indicated a significant improvement in participants' communication patterns following the training programme. This finding suggests that structured training programmes that focus on communication skills, emotional regulation, and collaborative problem-solving can enhance couples' ability to manage disagreements constructively. The improvement observed in

the post-test scores of the experimental group underscores the value of counselling interventions in strengthening marital communication. This finding is consistent with recent research indicating that communication and relationship skills training programmes can significantly improve marital functioning, reduce conflicts, and enhance relationship satisfaction among couples. A systematic review by Azarnik and colleagues (2024) reported that communication and relational skills interventions significantly improve marital functioning and reduce conflict among couples. Similarly, contemporary counselling studies have emphasized that targeted marital interventions such as communication skills training and assertiveness counselling can effectively reduce marital conflict and improve interpersonal understanding between partners.

The third finding of the study revealed a significant difference between the communication patterns of participants in the experimental group and those in the control group after the intervention. Participants who received conflict resolution training demonstrated significantly better communication patterns than those who did not receive the training. This finding further confirms the effectiveness of the intervention programme in improving marital communication among newly married couples. The result suggests that structured counselling programmes can provide couples with practical tools for managing marital disagreements more constructively. This finding aligns with contemporary research emphasizing that constructive conflict management strategies contribute to marital stability and emotional intimacy. Studies on marital relationships have consistently shown that when couples adopt constructive communication behaviours such as empathy, active listening, and collaborative negotiation, they are more likely to experience greater relationship satisfaction and long-term stability.

Generally, the findings of this study underscore the critical importance of conflict resolution training in promoting effective communication among newly married couples. The results demonstrate that while couples may initially rely on informal or inherited communication patterns, structured counselling interventions can significantly enhance their ability to manage conflicts constructively. By equipping couples with practical communication and conflict management skills, such interventions can contribute to healthier marital relationships and improved marital satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of conflict resolution training on the communication patterns of newly married couples in Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that newly married couples exhibited varying communication patterns prior to the intervention, suggesting that many couples rely largely on personal experiences, cultural values, and informal interaction patterns in managing marital disagreements. While such sources of guidance may provide useful insights, they may not always equip couples with the necessary skills to effectively manage interpersonal conflicts within marriage.

The study further established that participation in a structured conflict resolution training programme significantly improved the communication patterns of couples in the experimental

group. Participants who received the training demonstrated better communication behaviours, including more constructive approaches to managing disagreements, compared with their communication patterns prior to the intervention. In addition, the study found a significant difference between participants in the experimental group and those in the control group after the intervention, indicating that the improvement in communication patterns could be attributed to the conflict resolution training programme.

The results suggest that equipping couples with practical conflict resolution and communication skills can promote healthier interaction patterns, reduce the intensity of marital conflicts, and strengthen relationship stability. Consequently, conflict resolution training can serve as a valuable counselling strategy for supporting newly married couples in developing constructive communication practices that foster marital harmony and long-term relationship satisfaction.

Recommendations

1. Religious institutions and marriage registries should incorporate conflict resolution training into premarital counselling programs to equip couples with essential communication skills from the outset.
2. Local government and community development agencies should support and fund relationship education initiatives targeting young and newly married couples.
3. Guidance counsellors and marriage therapists should adopt structured, evidence-based conflict resolution modules as part of routine marital counseling services.
4. Education ministries and family welfare departments should recognize conflict resolution training as a vital tool for promoting family stability and consider including it in adult education and family life curricula.

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