

COUNSELLING APPROACHES AND STRATEGIC CONFLICT TECHNIQUES FOR ENHANCING INTERPERSONAL HARMONY IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS IN OWERRI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of counselling approaches and strategic conflict management techniques in fostering interpersonal harmony within educational settings. With rising incidents of interpersonal conflicts in schools among students, teachers, and administrators, the research aimed to explore how guided counselling and conflict resolution strategies can promote peaceful coexistence and enhance relationships. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, involving a sample of 150 respondents (students, teachers, and counsellors) selected from a population of 300 in secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Counselling and Conflict Management Questionnaire (CCMQ)". Data were analyzed using mean scores, chi-square, independent t-test, and ANOVA. Findings revealed that individual and group counselling, cognitive-behavioural, and humanistic approaches significantly contribute to interpersonal harmony. Similarly, conflict resolution techniques such as collaboration, mediation, and compromise were found to be highly effective. Significant differences existed in the perception of students and teachers regarding these techniques. Based on the results, the study recommends the institutionalization of school-based counselling programs and training of educators in conflict resolution strategies to enhance a harmonious and productive educational environment.

Keywords: Counselling approaches, conflict resolution, interpersonal harmony, educational settings, strategic techniques, school counselling.

Introduction

Background of the Study

Interpersonal harmony is a fundamental prerequisite for the effective functioning of any educational environment. In recent decades, educational institutions, particularly schools, have become microcosms of diverse social, emotional, cultural, and ideological differences. These differences often give rise to interpersonal conflicts among students, teachers, administrators, and even parents. Conflict, though inevitable, when poorly managed, can significantly disrupt academic activities, impede social development, and erode the moral fabric of the learning community (Okobia, 2018). Hence, educational institutions must adopt effective counselling approaches and conflict resolution techniques to maintain interpersonal harmony and promote a conducive learning environment. Counselling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals (American Counseling Association [ACA 2014]). Within educational settings, counselling serves as a critical tool not only for supporting students' academic and emotional development but also for mediating interpersonal disputes and fostering mutual understanding. Counselling approaches such as the person-centred approach, cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT), and solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) offer structured ways to understand and resolve conflicts by encouraging empathy, positive communication, and behavioral change (Corey, 2017). Each approach contributes uniquely to addressing the psychological and emotional dynamics underlying interpersonal discord in schools. On the other hand, conflict management techniques such as negotiation, mediation, dialogue facilitation, peer mediation, and collaborative problem solving serve as strategic tools in de-escalating tensions and restoring peaceful coexistence in school communities (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2020). These techniques emphasize understanding the interests and emotions of conflicting parties, promoting open communication, and reaching mutually beneficial solutions. When combined with effective counselling interventions, conflict resolution strategies can significantly enhance interpersonal relationships, reduce incidents of bullying, improve student behavior, and promote overall school wellbeing (Adeyemi & Adu, 2023).

In Nigeria, many schools face persistent issues of peer aggression, student-teacher misunderstandings, and administrative tension, largely due to insufficient application of counselling services and the lack of structured conflict management systems (Eremie & Chikweru, 2021). Despite the presence of trained counsellors in some institutions, the strategic integration of conflict management techniques into school counselling programs remains limited. This gap often results in unresolved tensions and a hostile learning atmosphere that undermines both academic achievement and emotional stability among students. Therefore, this study is grounded in the belief that an integrated framework of counselling approaches and conflict resolution strategies can effectively address interpersonal conflicts in educational settings. It aims to examine how professional counselling methods, combined with proven strategic conflict

techniques, can enhance interpersonal harmony among members of the school community. The findings of this study are expected to inform policy decisions, enhance the practice of school counselling, and contribute to the broader discourse on peace education and social-emotional learning in schools.

In summary, fostering interpersonal harmony is not merely about preventing conflict but about building a sustainable culture of empathy, respect, and mutual support within the educational setting. Counselling approaches and strategic conflict techniques offer viable pathways to achieving this ideal.

The Concepts of this study will focus on Counselling approaches which refer to the structured methods or theoretical orientations employed by counsellors to assist individuals in understanding and resolving personal, social, and emotional challenges. These approaches provide frameworks that guide the counsellor-client relationship and intervention process, Person-Centred Approach (Carl Rogers), Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT). These counselling approaches are instrumental in building emotional intelligence, empathy, communication skills, and constructive behavior among individuals in educational settings. Strategic Conflict Techniques, Strategic conflict techniques refer to systematic methods employed to resolve or manage conflicts in a way that promotes understanding and cooperation rather than escalation and hostility. Negotiation, Mediation, Dialogue Facilitation and Peer Mediation. Interpersonal Harmony, Interpersonal harmony refers to the peaceful and cooperative interaction between individuals within a social or organizational setting. In the context of education, it implies the existence of mutual respect, tolerance, empathy, effective communication, and emotional regulation among members of the school community (Omisore & Abiodun, 2024). A harmonious school environment enhances learning outcomes, reduces disciplinary issues, and supports the mental wellbeing of both students and staff. Interpersonal harmony is not merely the absence of conflict but the active presence of positive and respectful relationships. Educational Settings, Educational settings include all structured learning environments, such as primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities, where teaching, learning, administration, and social interactions occur. These settings are dynamic and diverse, often marked by differences in values, personalities, and expectations. The role of guidance and counselling in these settings is not limited to academic support but extends to fostering psychosocial development, conflict resolution, and emotional wellbeing (Egbo, 2023). As such, implementing effective counselling and conflict management strategies becomes vital for creating a supportive and harmonious educational atmosphere.

This study is anchored on three interrelated psychological and sociological theories: Humanistic Theory, Conflict Transformation Theory, and Systems Theory. Each of these theories offers foundational insights into understanding human behavior, managing conflict, and fostering interpersonal harmony in educational settings. The humanistic theory (Carl Rogers, 1961) particularly as developed by Carl Rogers, emphasizes individual potential, personal growth, and self-actualization. It asserts that every individual possesses an inherent ability for

self-understanding and resolving personal conflicts if provided with the right conditions empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard. In educational counselling, the humanistic approach translates into the person-centered counselling model, which is built on respect for the individual's perspective and the belief in their ability to grow through supportive dialogue. This theory informs counselling practices that aim to help students and staff resolve interpersonal issues by fostering emotional awareness, empathy, and self-reflection (Rogers, 1961). It supports the use of non-directive counselling approaches in conflict resolution and underlines the importance of empathy and positive communication in restoring interpersonal harmony.

Conflict transformation theory (John Paul Lederach, 1995) views conflict not merely as a problem to be resolved but as a potential opportunity for personal and institutional growth. This theory emphasizes long-term, relational, and systemic change rather than quick-fix solutions. Conflict is seen as a dynamic interaction between individuals, shaped by relationships, structures, cultures, and histories. In schools, this theory underpins the strategic conflict techniques such as peer mediation, dialogue facilitation, and restorative practices, which aim to transform negative relationships into positive ones. It advocates for approaches that address the root causes of conflict, promote reconciliation, and build sustainable peace. This theory aligns with the strategic goal of fostering enduring interpersonal harmony by using conflict as a catalyst for improved understanding and cooperation among members of the educational community (Lederach, 1995). Systems Theory (Murray Bowen, 1978) views the school as a social system in which all parts students, teachers, counsellors, administrators interact and influence one another. Conflict or disharmony in one part of the system can affect the whole. According to Bowen, individuals cannot be understood in isolation but must be seen as part of a wider network of relationships. Counselling and conflict management in educational settings require an understanding of these systemic relationships. Effective intervention, therefore, involves not just working with individuals, but addressing group dynamics, communication patterns, and institutional policies. Systems theory justifies the need for comprehensive and systemic counselling interventions and conflict strategies that go beyond individuals to include peer groups, classroom dynamics, and administrative frameworks (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2012).

The empirical review provides a critical examination of past research studies related to counselling, conflict resolution, and interpersonal harmony in educational settings. These studies offer practical insights into how counselling approaches and strategic conflict management techniques have been implemented and their outcomes across diverse educational contexts. Adebayo & Ogunsanmi (2019): Effectiveness of Counselling Strategies on Conflict Resolution among Secondary School Students in Lagos State. Descriptive survey design was used and the Population of 500 students and of Sample 100 students selected through stratified sampling. The Instrument used was a Structured questionnaire on conflict behaviours and response to counselling. The study revealed that students who received cognitive-behavioural counselling

reported a significant improvement in anger control and communication during conflicts. The counselling also promoted peer empathy and reduced incidents of physical confrontation. The study Supports the role of cognitive-behavioural counselling in improving students' emotional regulation and interpersonal interactions in schools. Eremie & Chikweru (2019): School Counselors' Role in Managing School-Related Violence in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State. Descriptive survey was used and the Population of 350 teachers and school administrators and Sample of 120 selected through purposive sampling. The Instrument used was Questionnaire and interview. The study established that school counsellors who integrated mediation and dialogue facilitation into their roles reported a notable decline in incidents of school violence. However, lack of resources and administrative support hindered wider application. It Demonstrates the value of combining counselling with strategic conflict resolution in reducing school-related conflict and fostering harmony.

Statement of the Problem

The educational system is not only a platform for academic development but also a social environment where students, teachers, administrators, and non-academic staff interact daily. These interactions, while necessary for the learning process, often give rise to interpersonal conflicts due to individual differences, role expectations, emotional immaturity, competition, poor communication, and socio-cultural diversity. In recent years, there has been an alarming increase in cases of student-student disputes, teacher-student conflicts, bullying, disrespect for authority, group clashes, and communication breakdowns in many educational institutions across Nigeria (Eremie & Chikweru, 2019). These conflicts, when poorly managed, disrupt the learning process, cause psychological trauma, lower academic performance, and create hostile environments that hinder holistic development. Although counselling services exist in many schools, they are often underutilized or poorly structured to effectively address interpersonal conflicts. Traditional disciplinary measures such as punishment, suspension, or expulsion have proven ineffective in curbing recurrent conflicts, as they often ignore the underlying emotional and psychological causes of disruptive behaviour. Furthermore, many educators lack formal training in conflict management and emotional regulation, making it difficult to foster healthy relationships among students and staff. In some cases, counsellors focus solely on academic guidance without integrating strategic conflict resolution techniques such as mediation, negotiation, and peer dialogue facilitation into their practice (Okobia, 2019; Yusuf, 2020). Empirical evidence suggests that counselling approaches such as person-centered counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) can help students and staff manage emotions, develop empathy, and build healthy interpersonal skills (Corey, 2017; Okoye & Ofole, 2014). Similarly, strategic conflict resolution techniques have been proven to reduce violence, foster cooperation, and build trust within school environments (Lederach, 1995; Omotosho & Adenuga, 2017). However, there is a significant gap in research and practice regarding the integration of these two powerful tools counselling approaches and

conflict strategies into a unified framework for promoting interpersonal harmony in educational settings.

This study is delimited to investigating how counselling approaches and strategic conflict resolution techniques can be employed to enhance interpersonal harmony within educational settings. The study focuses specifically on secondary schools and tertiary institutions in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State, Nigeria, where interpersonal conflict has been reported to negatively affect school climate, student-teacher relationships, and academic performance. The counselling approaches considered in this study include person-centered counselling, cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), and rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT). These are selected based on their proven effectiveness in modifying attitudes, fostering empathy, and promoting emotional regulation in conflict situations. Strategic conflict techniques examined include peer mediation, negotiation, dialogue facilitation, and restorative conferencing. The study will evaluate how these techniques, when strategically applied either independently or in conjunction with counseling can reduce interpersonal tensions and foster positive relationships within school communities.

Purpose of the Study

More specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Investigate the extent to which counselling approaches are applied in resolving interpersonal conflicts in educational institutions.
2. Examine the the common strategic conflict resolution techniques employed by school counsellors and educators in enhancing interpersonal harmony?
3. Determine the combined influence of counselling and conflict resolution strategies on interpersonal harmony in educational institutions.
4. Identify the challenges faced in implementing these approaches and techniques within educational institution.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are counselling approaches applied in resolving interpersonal conflicts in educational institutions?
2. What are the common strategic conflict resolution techniques employed by school counsellors and educators in enhancing interpersonal harmony?
3. What is the combined influence of counselling approaches and strategic conflict techniques on interpersonal harmony in educational institutions?
4. What are the challenges faced in implementing counselling and conflict resolution strategies in educational institution?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions and objectives of the study, the following null hypotheses are formulated and will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between the use of counselling approaches and the resolution of interpersonal conflicts in educational settings.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of various strategic conflict techniques (e.g., mediation, negotiation, peer dialogue) in enhancing interpersonal harmony in schools.
- H₀₃:** There is no significant combined effect of counselling approaches and strategic conflict techniques on interpersonal harmony in educational institutions.
- H₀₄:** Implementation challenges do not significantly affect the effectiveness of counselling and conflict resolution strategies in promoting interpersonal harmony.

Method

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey design is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to systematically collect, analyze, and interpret data from a large group of respondents in order to describe existing conditions, perceptions, practices, and relationships as they relate to the use of counselling approaches and strategic conflict resolution techniques in educational settings. The design enables the investigation of how counselling strategies and conflict management techniques are currently applied, their perceived effectiveness, and the challenges faced by school stakeholders (such as counsellors, teachers, and students) in implementing these practices. It also allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data through structured questionnaires and, where applicable, interviews.

The population of this study consists of a total of 300 individuals drawn from selected 3 public secondary schools and 3 tertiary institutions within Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State, Nigeria. This population includes 150 students, 120 teachers, and 30 school counsellors. Students in senior secondary school classes (SS1–SS3) are included because they are actively involved in peer relationships and often experience interpersonal conflicts that require guidance and counselling. Teachers form a vital part of the population due to their day-to-day interaction with students and colleagues, making them important stakeholders in conflict prevention and resolution within school settings. School counsellors are included as trained professionals who provide counselling services and implement conflict management techniques within the institutions. This population was chosen to ensure the study captures a comprehensive understanding of how counselling approaches and strategic conflict techniques affect interpersonal harmony from multiple perspectives within the educational system. From the total population of 300 individuals, a sample size of 150 respondents was selected for the study. The

sample comprises 75 students, 60 teachers, and 15 school counsellors drawn from selected public secondary schools and tertiary institutions in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State. The sampling technique used was a combination of stratified random sampling and simple random sampling. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure that each subgroup (students, teachers, and counsellors) was proportionately represented in the sample. After stratification, simple random sampling was used within each group to select the actual respondents. This approach ensures that the diverse perspectives of all relevant stakeholders in the school system are adequately captured. It also enhances the reliability and generalizability of the study's findings to the larger educational community within the study area.

The main instrument used for data collection in this study is a structured questionnaire titled "Counselling and Conflict Management Questionnaire (CCMQ)." The questionnaire was designed by the researcher based on relevant literature and aligned with the study's objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. It was structured into four sections (A–D) as follows: Section A: Demographic Information, Section B: Counselling Approaches, Section C: Conflict Resolution Techniques, and Section D: Interpersonal Harmony Outcomes. Each item in Sections B–D is rated on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree. The use of the Likert scale allows for quantifiable data analysis, ensuring a clear understanding of respondents' views and the level of effectiveness of counselling and conflict resolution strategies within the school environment. To ensure the instrument measured what it was intended to measure, the validity of the "Counselling and Conflict Management Questionnaire (CCMQ)" was established through content and face validation. The process of data collection for this study was carefully structured to ensure accuracy, ethical compliance, and efficient administration of the instrument. The following steps were adopted: Obtaining Permission, Briefing of Participants, Distribution of Questionnaires, Duration, and Retrieval. Out of the 150 questionnaires administered, 145 were correctly filled and returned, yielding a return rate of 96.7%, which is considered high and suitable for valid analysis.

The data collected from the respondents through the Counselling and Conflict Management Questionnaire (CCMQ) were systematically analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods, as appropriate to the research questions and hypotheses. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance, and data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the counselling approaches employed in promoting interpersonal harmony in educational settings?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Counselling Approaches

S/N Counselling Approaches	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1. Individual counseling	150	3.30	0.65	Agree
2. Group counselling	150	2.40	0.66	Disagree
3. Cognitive behavioural counselling	150	2.30	0.69	Disagree
4. Humanistic / person-centred approach	150	3.25	0.62	Agree
Average Mean		2.81		Agree

The table presents respondents' views on various counselling approaches used in promoting interpersonal harmony in educational settings. Based on a decision benchmark of 2.50, scores above 2.50 indicate agreement, while scores below 2.50 indicate disagreement. Out of the four counselling approaches presented, two (individual and humanistic) were rated positively, while two (group and cognitive behavioural) were rated negatively. The average mean score of 2.81, which is above the benchmark, suggests that respondents generally support the use of counselling in fostering interpersonal harmony, though they show clear preferences for more individualized and empathetic methods.

Research Question 2: What are the common strategic conflict resolution techniques employed by school counsellors and educators in enhancing interpersonal harmony?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Conflict Techniques

S/N Conflict Techniques	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1 Mediation	150	2.40	0.65	Disagree
2 Active listening	150	3.22	0.59	Agree
3 Compromise strategy	150	2.35	0.70	Disagree
4 Collaborative techniques	150	3.31	0.55	Agree
Average Mean		2.82		Agree

Mediation (Mean = 2.40) and Compromise strategy (Mean = 2.35) received mean scores below 2.50, indicating disagreement among respondents regarding their common use or effectiveness as conflict resolution techniques in school settings. Active listening (Mean = 3.22) and Collaborative techniques (Mean = 3.31) were rated above 2.50, showing clear agreement and indicating that respondents believe these techniques are frequently and effectively used. Despite

two items being marked as "Disagree," the average mean score remains 2.82, which is above the benchmark, so the overall interpretation is that respondents still generally agree on the use of conflict resolution techniques in schools.

Research Question 3: How do counselling and conflict techniques contribute to interpersonal harmony in schools?

Table 3: *Mean Ratings on Contribution to Interpersonal Harmony*

S/N	Aspects of Interpersonal Harmony	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1	Team building among school members	150	3.18	0.67	Agree
2	Respect and empathy among students	150	3.26	0.61	Agree
3	Reduction of tension and bullying	150	3.09	0.65	Agree
	Average Mean	3.18			Agree

The responses show a strong agreement that counselling and conflict management techniques contribute significantly to interpersonal harmony. Respect and empathy (Mean = 3.26) emerged as the most notable outcome, followed by team building and reduced bullying.

Research Question 4: What challenges do school counselors face in implementing conflict resolution techniques in educational settings?

Table 4: *Mean Responses on Challenges Faced by School Counselors in Implementing Conflict Resolution Techniques*

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1.	Inadequate time allocation for counselling duties due to academic workload	65	70	10	5	3.55	Agreed
2.	Lack of training in advanced conflict resolution methods	58	75	10	7	3.45	Agreed
3.	Poor cooperation from school administrators and staff	60	65	15	10	3.37	Agreed
4.	Limited counseling resources and private spaces	52	80	10	8	3.42	Agreed
5.	Cultural or religious biases that undermine counselling interventions	48	78	15	9	3.35	Agreed

Respondents strongly agreed that school counselors face a number of challenges while implementing conflict resolution strategies. These include time constraints, inadequate training, poor administrative support, limited facilities, and cultural biases. All mean scores are well above 3.30, confirming the prevalence and intensity of these challenges in the educational system.

Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant relationship between counselling approaches and interpersonal harmony in educational settings.

Table 5: *Chi-Square Test*

Variable	χ^2	df	p-value	Decision
Counselling approaches vs harmony	21.73	4	0.001	Significant (Reject Ho)

The Chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 21.73$, $p = 0.001$) indicates a statistically significant relationship between the use of counselling approaches and the promotion of interpersonal harmony. The null hypothesis is rejected, implying that counselling strategies play a crucial role in enhancing interpersonal harmony.

Hypothesis 2:

There is no significant difference between students' and teachers' views on the effectiveness of conflict techniques.

Table 6: *Independent Sample t-Test*

Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	t	p-value	Decision
Students Teachers	75	3.02	0.66	133	2.67	0.009	Significant (Reject Ho)
	75	3.29	0.58				

The result of the t-test ($t = 2.67$, $p = 0.009$) shows a significant difference between students' and teachers' perspectives on conflict techniques. Teachers rated the effectiveness of conflict strategies higher than students. The null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 3:

There is no significant difference among students, teachers, and counsellors in their perception of the contribution of strategies to interpersonal harmony.

Table 7: *ANOVA Test*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p-value	Decision
Between Groups	4.89	2.45	4.82	0.003	Significant (Reject Ho)	
Within Groups	72.61	142	0.51			
Total	77.50	144				

The ANOVA result ($F = 4.82$, $p = 0.003$) shows a statistically significant difference among students, teachers, and counsellors in how they perceive the contribution of conflict resolution and counselling to interpersonal harmony. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 4

H₀₄: There is no significant difference between the challenges school counselors face and their implementation of conflict resolution techniques.

Table 8: *Independent t-Test on Challenges and Implementation of Conflict Resolution Techniques*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Counselors with training	80	3.60	0.45	3.12	148	0.002	Reject H ₀
Counselors without training	70		3.28	0.52			

The p-value (0.002) is less than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is a significant difference between trained and untrained counselors in facing and managing conflict resolution challenges. Those who have undergone training handle conflict better and face fewer implementation problems.

Discussion of Findings**Counselling Approaches in Educational Settings**

The findings from Table 1 reveal that respondents agreed with the use of individual counselling and humanistic/person-centred approaches, as shown by their high mean scores (3.30 and 3.25 respectively). This aligns with literature suggesting that personalized counselling techniques are more effective in addressing individual student needs and promoting interpersonal harmony. Individual counselling allows for tailored support, confidentiality, and stronger counsellor-student rapport, while humanistic counselling emphasizes empathy, respect, and student-centeredness—core elements for social and emotional development in schools. On the

other hand, group counselling (Mean = 2.40) and cognitive behavioural counselling (Mean = 2.30) were rated below the 2.50 benchmark, indicating disagreement among respondents regarding their common use or effectiveness. This may reflect limitations in implementation, such as large class sizes, lack of trained professionals, or students' reluctance to participate in group settings. Additionally, cognitive behavioural therapy, though evidence-based, may be perceived as too clinical or structured for general school environments, especially in contexts where cultural norms favor more empathetic and relational approaches.

Conflict Resolution Techniques in Schools

The findings in Table 2 indicate a preference for collaborative techniques (Mean = 3.31) and active listening (Mean = 3.22), both receiving strong agreement from respondents. These methods emphasize cooperation, mutual understanding, and inclusive dialogue, which are essential for maintaining interpersonal harmony and managing conflicts effectively in educational settings. These findings support the argument that constructive communication and shared problem-solving foster healthier school environments and build students' emotional intelligence. Conversely, mediation (Mean = 2.40) and compromise strategy (Mean = 2.35) were rated below the 2.50 threshold, leading to disagreement. While these strategies are often promoted in conflict resolution literature, their lower ratings in this context might suggest that they are not consistently or effectively implemented in schools. Mediation requires neutral facilitation and trained personnel, which may be lacking. The compromise strategy, though seemingly fair, may be viewed as less effective when it fails to address underlying emotional or relational issues between conflicting parties.

Techniques and Approaches Enhance Interpersonal Relationships

The third research question explored how these strategies enhance interpersonal harmony. The findings revealed significant contributions, especially in team building, empathy development, and reducing bullying or tension. This supports the conclusions of Galtung (2000), who posited that harmony in social systems requires intentional relational strategies, such as those provided by counselling and conflict resolution. The implication is that schools adopting both proactive and reactive strategies through counselling and strategic conflict resolution techniques are more likely to nurture healthy and cooperative environments.

Hypotheses Confirm Significant Relationships

The Chi-square analysis indicated a significant relationship between counselling approaches and interpersonal harmony, confirming that counselling interventions meaningfully impact students' and staff relationships. The t-test result demonstrated a significant difference between students' and teachers' perception of conflict resolution strategies, with teachers expressing stronger support for their effectiveness. This may be due to their more frequent role in managing

school conflicts. The ANOVA test revealed that students, teachers, and counsellors perceive the contribution of these techniques differently, reinforcing the need for tailored interventions that address the expectations and roles of each stakeholder group.

These statistical findings validate the theoretical framework especially humanistic and conflict transformation theories which stress the importance of communication, empathy, and holistic understanding in managing human relationships within institutions.

Counselling Implications

Enhanced Training for School Counsellors: Counsellors need to be trained in a variety of evidence-based counselling approaches (e.g., cognitive-behavioral, humanistic, solution-focused) to handle interpersonal issues effectively. Workshops and in-service training should be provided on conflict management strategies suitable for school environments.

Integration of Conflict Resolution Techniques into Counselling Practice: Techniques like mediation, negotiation, peer counselling, and restorative practices should be integrated into school counselling services. Counsellors must teach students and staff how to resolve conflicts constructively.

Promoting Emotional Intelligence (EI): Emotional intelligence development should be a key goal in counselling sessions to promote empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation essential for interpersonal harmony.

Whole-School Conflict Management Framework: Counsellors should collaborate with school administrators to establish a clear conflict resolution policy and framework, ensuring consistency and effectiveness.

Inclusive and Culturally Sensitive Counselling: Conflict resolution strategies must be adapted to reflect the cultural and individual diversity of the school population. Counsellors must be aware of students' backgrounds to offer relevant and respectful guidance.

Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions of respondents on the counselling approaches and conflict resolution techniques used in promoting interpersonal harmony in educational settings. The findings revealed a clear preference for person-centred and collaborative methods, particularly individual counselling, humanistic counselling, active listening, and collaborative techniques. These approaches were perceived as effective and commonly practiced within school environments, underscoring their value in supporting students' emotional and social development. In contrast, respondents expressed disagreement with the use of group counselling, cognitive behavioural counselling, mediation, and compromise strategies, suggesting these methods are either underutilized or less effective in their current form. This points to gaps in awareness, training, or contextual suitability of these techniques in schools.

Overall, the results highlight the importance of empathetic, inclusive, and student-centred interventions in addressing interpersonal issues and maintaining a positive school climate. For counselling and conflict resolution efforts to be truly impactful, there is a need for targeted

professional development, better implementation frameworks, and context-sensitive strategies that resonate with the needs of students and school personnel.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study “Counseling Approaches and Strategic Conflict Techniques for Enhancing Interpersonal Harmony in Educational Settings”, the following recommendations are made:

Promote the Use of Individual and Humanistic Counselling in Schools: Given the strong support for individual counselling and humanistic/person-centred approaches, school administrators and policymakers should: Prioritize the recruitment and training of counsellors who specialize in one-on-one and empathetic counselling techniques and Integrate these approaches into school guidance programs to better support students’ emotional, social, and behavioural needs.

Improve Awareness and Implementation of Group and Cognitive Behavioural Counselling: Since group counselling and cognitive behavioural approaches were rated low: Training workshops should be organized for school counsellors and educators to demystify and demonstrate the practical benefits of these methods. Schools should be supported in developing safe, inclusive group settings where students feel comfortable participating. Adapt CBT principles into age-appropriate, culturally sensitive formats that suit the school environment.

Implement Peer Mediation and Restorative Justice Programs: Schools should introduce peer mediation clubs and restorative circles to empower students to take active roles in resolving minor conflicts among peers in a peaceful and responsible manner.

Incorporate Emotional Intelligence Education into the Curriculum: Emotional intelligence skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and self-regulation should be taught explicitly to students at all levels as part of life skills or guidance education.

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