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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

The Journal of Professional Counselling (JPC) serves as the official publication of the Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON). It is dedicated to advancing the theory and practice of Guidance and Counselling in Nigeria and worldwide through publishing well-researched and original articles. The journal welcomes submissions from authors in the field of counselling psychology and related disciplines, aiming to enhance knowledge and skills in counselling practice. Each article undergoes a blind peer-review process and plagiarism tests to ensure a high level of originality prior to publication.

This volume explored counselling interventions that strengthen relationship functioning and facilitate effective dispute resolution. Studies addressing marital conflicts, premarital counselling, family systems, emotional abuse, infidelity, reconciliation processes, communication patterns, and culturally relevant therapeutic models significantly enriched this discourse.

Highlights of this Issue include:

- Dispute Resolution in Relationships and Counselling: Healthy relationships thrive on effective communication, mutual respect, trust, and constructive conflict management. Unfortunately, unresolved disputes continue to threaten marital stability, family cohesion, workplace harmony, and interpersonal wellbeing. Professional counselling provides individuals and couples with practical skills for understanding differences, restoring communication, rebuilding trust, and fostering resilience.
- Negotiation Skills and Counselling: Negotiation is a fundamental life skill that enables individuals and groups to manage differences, achieve mutually beneficial outcomes, and sustain healthy relationships. Within counselling practice, negotiation extends beyond bargaining to include collaborative decision-making, problem-solving, and the facilitation of constructive dialogue among conflicting parties.

  This theme pervades this discourse and highlighted scholarly works examining negotiation theories, counselling techniques that enhance negotiation competence, conflict de-escalation strategies, and applications across educational, organisational, marital, legal, and multicultural settings. Research focusing on negotiation training, communication competence, ethical considerations, and culturally sensitive negotiation practices was particularly highlighted.
- Emotional Intelligence in Dispute Resolution and Counselling: Emotional intelligence has emerged as one of the most significant predictors of successful interpersonal

relationships, effective leadership, and constructive conflict management. The ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and appropriately express emotions enables individuals to navigate disagreements with empathy, self-control, and sound judgment. Within counselling, emotional intelligence serves as both a therapeutic objective and a professional competency.

This volume investigated the role of emotional intelligence in counselling effectiveness, dispute prevention, conflict transformation, relationship satisfaction, leadership development, educational practice, and organisational behaviour. Studies integrating emotional intelligence with psychological wellbeing, resilience, communication, and social competence were given priority in this edition.

The Editorial Board expresses her gratitude to all contributing authors and peer reviewers for their invaluable efforts and time. The Board remains committed to continuously improving the quality of the Journal of Professional Counselling (JPC) to meet globally expected standards. The association maintains a functional journal website, www.aprocon.org.ng where published articles are available online, ensuring increased visibility and readership. We are happy to announce that the Journal is indexed on Boldscholar and can also be accessed online at boldscholar.com/Home/JournalDetails/JOPC

Professor Mary O. Esere

Editor-in-Chief,

JPC.

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PERCEIVED IMPACT OF COMMUNITY-BASED COUNSELLING ON DISPUTES RESOLUTION IN IJANIKIN, LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of community-based counselling on dispute resolution inIjanikin, Lagos State, Nigeria. Community-based counselling offers a grassroots approach to conflict management, emphasizing communication, empathy, and mutual understanding. The descriptive survey research design was used, the population of the study were residents of Ijanikin. The sample size of 200 participants was selected using purposive sampling technique for selecting key informants, community-based leaders, counsellors, and a stratified random sampling method to select residents from various wards within Ijanikin to ensure representation. Data were collected using self-developed questionnaire named Community -Based Counselling on Dispute Resolution Questionaires (CBCDRQ). Cronbach Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the instrument and value of r = 0.89 was obtained. The data from the self-developed questionnaires are analyzed using descriptive statistic for mean and standard deviations and inferential statistics were used to calculate One-Sample t-test, Chi-Square Test and One-Way ANOVA. Findings show that community-based counselling significantly contributes to peaceful cohabitation and reduces the incidence of prolonged disputes.The study concluded that community-based counselling holds great promise for promoting social harmony, reducing violence, and enhancing justice in local Nigerian communities like Ijanikin. To consolidate these gains, there is a pressing need for multi-level investment and community engagement aimed at strengthening the foundations of counselling practice and making it more accessible, respected, and impactful. It was recommended that there should be increase training and capacity building for community counsellors and integrate counselling into educational curricula and youth programmes.

Keywords: Community-based counselling, disputes resolution, conflict management, community development.

Introduction

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interaction, particularly in diverse and densely populated communities. In Nigeria, the rapid urbanization and socio-economic disparities have exacerbated communal tensions, necessitating effective conflict resolution mechanisms. Ijanikin, a suburban area in Lagos State, exemplifies such communities where disputes often arise from land ownership issues, cultural differences, and resource allocation. Community-based counselling involves providing psychological support and guidance within the community setting, aiming to address interpersonal and communal issues. This approach is particularly effective in multicultural communities where understanding diverse cultural backgrounds is essential (Adepoju & Oyewunmi, 2021). In the view of Onyema et al. (2025) demonstrated that integrative counselling approaches, including culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy, and relational therapy, significantly reduced intercultural conflicts in Ogun and Oyo States. Community-based peace education programs have been identified as crucial in preventing conflicts and building peace among youths and adults. Abba and Haruna (2023) emphasized the importance of integrating such programmes into Nigeria's educational system to promote good inter and intra-group relationships.

Onyema et al.(2025) posited that traditional methods of dispute resolution, including interventions by community elders and religious leaders, have historically played a significant role in maintaining peace. However, these approaches sometimes lack the neutrality and structured framework required to address contemporary conflicts effectively. Consequently, there has been a growing interest in community-based counselling as a complementary strategy for dispute resolution.

Siyadion et al.(2025); Ogunbiyi and Obiweluozor, (2023) opined that Community-based counselling involves trained professionals working within the community to facilitate dialogue, promote understanding, and develop conflict resolution skills among residents. This approach not only addresses the immediate issues but also empowers individuals with the tools to manage future conflicts constructively. It shown that such interventions can lead to significant reductions in community tensions and foster a culture of peace. Amodu and Usman (2020) emphasized that grassroots conflict resolution efforts are more trusted in Nigerian communities compared to formal justice systems, which are often perceived as inaccessible or biased. The community members' preference for counselling over litigation mirrors the growing recognition that non-adversarial methods are more sustainable for community peace-building (Nwachukwu & Oladele, 2019).

The relevance of community-based counselling has been further underscored by national policies aimed at promoting alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms. The Nigerian government's National Policy on Arbitration and ADR, approved in 2024, emphasizes the importance of accessible and efficient dispute resolution methods to alleviate the burden on the judicial system and enhance social cohesion (Usman et al., 2025; Siyadion et al., 2025).

In the context of Ijanikin, implementing community-based counselling programs could address the unique challenges faced by the community, such as youth restiveness, inter-ethnic conflicts, and disputes over communal resources. Fostering open communication and mutual respect, these programs have the potential to transform conflict dynamics and contribute to sustainable peace in the area (Ogunbiyi & Obiweluozor, 2023).

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms, such as mediation, arbitration, and negotiation, offer effective means of resolving disputes without resorting to litigation. Usman, Akintayo et al. (2025) highlighted the benefits of ADR in Nigeria, noting its role in reducing litigation backlogs, facilitating collaborative problem-solving, and preserving relationships. Onifade et al. (2022) found that youth restiveness and violence are often mitigated more effectively through community counselling than through punitive measures.

Aluko and Balogun (2021) emphasized that family and land disputes in peri-urban Lagos are best resolved through community-based approaches due to shared values and cultural familiarity. Training community leaders in ADR techniques has also proven beneficial. For instance, NGOs have organized training sessions for traditional and religious leaders in Kaduna State, enhancing their capacity to amicably resolve disputes within their communities.

Effective conflict management involves identifying the root causes of conflicts and implementing strategies to address them. Social work interventions have been instrumental in managing conflicts in areas like Bakassi Local Government Area of Cross River State. Ikpeme et al. (2025) found that social workers played a key role in mitigating conflicts by providing psycho-social support, advocating for vulnerable populations, and facilitating dialogue among conflicting parties.

Additionally, incorporating conflict management into educational curricula can prepare future professionals to handle conflicts effectively. Onalua et al. (2024) evaluated the social work curriculum at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and recommended integrating indigenous conflict management methods to enhance practitioners' readiness. According to Eze and Ojo (2023), the lack of institutional backing for community counselling programs often leads to burnout among counsellors and reduced trust in the services. Similarly, Yusuf and Adeyemi (2024) observed that many Nigerians still view counselling with suspicion due to religious and cultural misconceptions. The lack of an enforceable policy framework to support community-based counselling programmes (Ibrahim &Umeh, 2025).

Community development initiatives aim to improve the well-being of community members through participatory and sustainable practices. Organizations like the Strategic Action for Community Development Nigeria (SACD-Nigeria) have been at the forefront of promoting community-led development. In 2020, SACD-Nigeria convened a coalition to co-create strategies addressing challenges such as insecurity, poverty, and hunger, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and innovation (SACD, 2020).The Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN) program has facilitated peace agreements between conflicting groups, such as farmers and herders in

Adamawa State, demonstrating the impact of community engagement in conflict resolution and development (MCN, 2020).

This study aims to explore the impact of community-based counselling on dispute resolution in Ijanikin, Lagos State. It seeks to assess the effectiveness of these interventions, identify the types of disputes commonly addressed, and evaluate the challenges faced by community counsellors. The study will provide insights into the role of counselling in enhancing community harmony and inform strategies for improving conflict resolution practices in similar settings.

Statement of the Problem

In Ijanikin, Lagos State, persistent interpersonal and communal disputes have posed a significant threat to social harmony and community development. Traditional conflict resolution methods, though valuable, are often limited by bias, lack of professionalism, and reduced influence in rapidly changing social contexts. Many conflicts escalate due to poor communication, emotional distress, and lack of access to structured mediation. Despite the introduction of community-based counselling as a grassroots strategy to address these issues, there remains limited empirical understanding of its effectiveness in resolving disputes in the area. This gap raises important questions about the relevance, reach, and impact of community-based counselling in promoting peace and sustainable coexistence in Ijanikin.

Purpose of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the effectiveness of community-based counselling in resolving disputes among residents of Ijanikin.
2. To identify the types of disputes most commonly addressed through community-based counselling in the area.
3. To assess the challenges faced by counsellors and stakeholders in implementing community-based dispute resolution strategies.

Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. How effective is community-based counselling in resolving disputes among residents of Ijanikin?
2. What types of disputes are most commonly addressed through community-based counselling in Ijanikin?
3. What challenges do counsellors and stakeholders face in implementing community-based dispute resolution strategies in Ijanikin?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions the null hypotheses formulated are as follows:

H_{01}:There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of community-based counselling in resolving disputes among residents of Ijanikin .

Ho_2 : There is no significant difference in the type of disputes most commonly addressed through community-based counseling .

Ho_3 : There is no significant difference in the challenges faced by counselors and other stakeholders in implementing community-based disputes resolution strategies

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was used, this allows for an in-depth understanding of how counselling affects dispute resolution while also quantifying the extent of its impact.The population of the study were residents of Ijanikin, particularly individuals who have experienced community disputes, community leaders, local counsellors and stakeholders involved in conflict resolution. The sample size of 200 participants, consisting of both direct beneficiaries of counselling and key informants were selected using purposive sampling technique for selecting key informants (community leaders and counsellors), and a stratified random sampling method to select residents from various wards within Ijanikin to ensure representation. Data were collected using self-developed questionnaire named Community -Based Counselling on Dispute Resolution Questionnaires (CBCDRQ). The items were designed using a Five-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from Strongly Disagree, Disagree,Agree, Strongly Agree and Neutral (Undecided) which has five (5) points. Cronbach Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the instrument and value of $r = 0.89$ was obtained which indicates that the instrument is very reliable, and the items measure a consistent regarding the impact of community-based counselling on dispute resolution in Ijanikin. The data from the self-developed questionnaires are analyzed using descriptive statistics for mean and standard deviations and inferential statistics was used to calculate One-Sample t-test, Chi-Square Test and One-Way ANOVA.

Results: How Effective is Community-Based Counselling in Resolving Disputes Among Residents of Ijanikin?

Table 1: *Effectiveness of Community-Based Counselling*

S/N	Items	Mean	S D	Remark
1	Community-based counselling has helped reduce conflicts in my neighborhood.	4.08	0.81	Agreed
2	I believe counselling is more effective than legal intervention in resolving community disputes.	3.94	0.83	Agreed
3	Disputes are resolved more quickly when community counsellors are involved.	4.08	0.81	Agreed
4	Counselling sessions help conflicting parties understand each other better.	3.90	0.81	Agreed
5	I have personally benefited from community counselling during a dispute.	3.94	0.85	Agreed
6	Community counsellors in Ijanikin are skilled at managing conflicts.	4.04	0.82	Agreed
7	Counselling outcomes are usually accepted by all parties involved.	3.91	0.83	Agreed
8	Community-based counselling promotes lasting peace among residents.	3.91	0.81	Agreed
	Weighted Mean	**3.97**		

In Table 1, the result indicates a strong consensus among respondents that community-based counselling is an effective method for resolving disputes. With a weighted mean of 3.97, respondents agreed that this form of intervention fosters understanding, promotes peaceful coexistence, and provides timely resolution to interpersonal and communal conflicts.

Results: What Types of Disputes are most Commonly Addressed through Community-based Counselling in Ijanikin?

Table 2: *Types of Disputes Addressed by Community Counselling*

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Family disputes are often resolved through community-based counselling.	3.98	0.85	Agreed
2	Land and property disputes are common in Ijanikin and often require counselling.	3.94	0.81	Agreed
3	Youth-related conflicts (e.g., gang clashes) are addressed through community counselling.	4.11	0.82	Agreed
4	Marital and relationship issues are resolved using counselling services in the area.	4.01	0.79	Agreed
5	Religious or cultural misunderstandings are commonly addressed by community counselling.	3.99	0.82	Agreed
6	Conflicts between neighbors are commonly resolved with the help of counsellors.	3.99	0.84	Agreed
7	Disputes involving financial misunderstandings are referred to community-based counselling.	4.03	0.82	Agreed
8	Community-based counselling is used to resolve disputes during community development projects.	4.00	0.83	Agreed
	Weighted Mean	**4.00**		

In Table 2, the result shows that a broad spectrum of disputes is addressed through counselling in Ijanikin, including family conflicts, land/property disputes, youth violence, and religious misunderstandings, with a weighted mean of 4.00. The highest rated item pointed to youth-related conflicts, revealing the community's concern over increasing youth violence and gang-related issues.

Results: What Challenges do Counsellors and Stakeholders face in Implementing Community – Based Dispute Resolution Strategies in ijanikin?

Table 3: *Challenges Faced by Counsellors and Stakeholders*

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	There are not enough trained counsellors in Ijanikin to manage community disputes.	4.06	0.81	Agreed
2	Lack of funding limits the effectiveness of community-based counselling programs.	4.02	0.82	Agreed
3	Cultural beliefs and stigma prevent people from seeking counselling services.	3.90	0.78	Agreed
4	Many residents are unaware of the availability of community-based counselling.	4.07	0.83	Agreed
5	Facilities for community counselling are inadequate in Ijanikin.	3.93	0.82	Agreed
6	Community leaders do not provide enough support to counsellors.	3.90	0.82	Agreed
7	Disputes sometimes escalate due to poor implementation of counselling strategies.	4.02	0.81	Agreed
8	There is no clear policy framework guiding community-based counselling in this area.	4.13	0.80	Agreed
	Weighted Mean4.00			

In Table 3, despite the noted effectiveness, the result uncovered several challenges impeding the optimal delivery of counselling services. With a weighted mean of 4.00, respondents pointed to issues such as inadequate number of trained counsellors, poor funding, lack of awareness, weak policy support, and cultural stigma.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis one: There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of community-based counselling in resolving disputes among residents of Ijanikin.

Table 4: *One-Sample t-test Results for Effectiveness of Community-Based Counselling*

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	df	p-value
Effectiveness of Community-Based Counselling	200	3.97	0.82	16.82	199	<0.001

Table 4, the results obtained compares the sample mean 3.97 to a neutral value assumed to be 3. The significant t-value 16.82 and p-value <0.001 indicate that community-based counselling is perceived as significantly effective. p-value of less than 0.05 is generally considered significant. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected

Hypothesis two: There is no significant difference in the type of disputes most commonly addressed through community-based counseling.

Table 5: *Chi-Square Test for Independence Results for Types of Disputes Addressed*

Type of Dispute	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Chi-Square Statistic	df	p-value
Family Disputes	199	200	0.005	5	0.999
Land/Property Disputes	197	200	0.045	5	0.999
Youth-Related Conflicts	205	200	0.625	5	0.998
Marital Issues	200	200	0.000	5	1.000
Cultural Issues	199	200	0.005	5	0.999
Neighbor Conflicts	199	200	0.005	5	0.999
Total	**1200**	**1200**	**0.685**		

Table 5, the results obtained compares observed frequencies of each dispute type with expected frequencies. The low Chi-Square statistic 0.685 and high p-value 0.999 indicate no significant difference in how often each dispute type is addressed. Thus, null hypothesis accepted .

Hypothesis three: There is no significant differences in the challenges faced by counselors and other stakeholders in implementing community-based disputes resolution strategies

Table 6: *One-Way ANOVA Results for Challenges Faced by Counselors and Stakeholders*

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	MS	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	2.56	7	0.366	0.550	0.792
Within Groups	98.64	1488	0.066		
Total	**101.20**	**1495**			

Table 6, the results obtained compares the means of different challenge categories. The low F-value 0.550 and high p-value 0.792 suggest no significant difference in the severity of different challenges. Thus, null hypothesis accepted.

Discussion of findings

How effective is community-based counselling in resolving disputes among residents of Ijanikin?

This finding aligns with Adepoju and Oyewunmi (2021), who noted that community-based counselling enhances social integration by addressing the emotional and psychological roots of

conflict. Similarly, Amodu and Usman (2020) emphasized that grassroots conflict resolution efforts are more trusted in Nigerian communities compared to formal justice systems, which are often perceived as inaccessible or biased. The community members' preference for counselling over litigation mirrors the growing recognition that non-adversarial methods are more sustainable for community peacebuilding (Nwachukwu & Oladele, 2019). This suggests that when properly structured, community counselling can serve as a cornerstone for peace in urbanizing areas like Ijanikin

What types of disputes are most commonly addressed through community-based counselling in Ijanikin?

This observation is supported by Onifade et al. (2022), who found that youth restiveness and violence are often mitigated more effectively through community counselling than through punitive measures. Also, Aluko and Balogun (2021) emphasized that family and land disputes in peri-urban Lagos are best resolved through community-based approaches due to shared values and cultural familiarity.These findings highlight the versatility of community counselling and its capacity to adapt to different conflict domains, making it a vital tool for local governance and social cohesion.

What challenges do counsellors and stakeholders face in implementing community-based dispute resolution strategies in Ijanikin?

These challenges reflect the broader systemic weaknesses in Nigeria's community development and mental health frameworks. It was corroborated with Eze and Ojo (2023) that the lack of institutional backing for community counselling programmes often leads to burnout among counsellors and reduced trust in the services. Similarly supported by Yusuf and Adeyemi (2024) observed that many Nigerians still view counselling with suspicion due to religious and cultural misconceptions. The lack of an enforceable policy framework to support community-based counselling programs (Ibrahim &Umeh, 2025).Without formal recognition and integration into local government structures, these initiatives remain underfunded and underutilized.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the role and impact of community-based counselling in resolving disputes within Ijanikin, a densely populated and socio-culturally diverse area of Lagos State. The findings from the survey and statistical analysis provide robust evidence that community-based counselling is not only widely recognized but also actively utilized as an effective conflict resolution mechanism across a range of interpersonal and communal disputes.The high weighted mean scores across the three major focus areas effectiveness, types of disputes addressed, and challenges clearly demonstrate that resident's value counselling as a viable alternative to legal or violent conflict resolution methods. Specifically, the study revealed that counselling services have been instrumental in resolving family issues, land and property disputes, youth-related conflicts, and even religious and cultural misunderstandings. This emphasizes the flexibility and cultural sensitivity of community counselling strategies in comparison to formal judicial processes.

However, the study also identified significant structural and operational barriers that limit the full potential of community-based counselling. These include a shortage of trained personnel, limited public awareness, poor infrastructural support, and the absence of clear government policy frameworks to support these grassroots initiatives. Unless these challenges are addressed, the sustainability and scalability of counselling as a tool for peace-building may be compromised. The study affirmed that community-based counselling holds great promise for promoting social harmony, reducing violence, and enhancing justice in local Nigerian communities like Ijanikin. To consolidate these gains, there is a pressing need for multi-level investment, policy development, and community engagement aimed at strengthening the foundations of counselling practice and making it more accessible, respected, and impactful.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the following were recommended

1. Government and NGOs should provide funding and training for community counsellors.
2. Awareness campaigns should be launched to educate the public on the benefits of counselling.
3. Integration of traditional and modern conflict resolution methods should be encouraged.
4. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of counselling programs should be implemented.

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PERCEPTION OF DIVORCE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AMONG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN GOMBE METROPOLIS, GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between parental divorce and juvenile delinquency in Gombe Metropolis, Gombe State Nigeria. The research explores the breakdown of family structures, societal stigmatization, and insufficient support systems that contribute to delinquent behaviors such as truancy, theft, violence, and substance abuse. Utilizing Krejcie and Morgan's formula, a sample size of 375 respondents were selected from a population of 1,000 individuals, including children from divorced families, their parents, and community stakeholders such as educators, social service providers, juvenile justice professionals, and community leaders. Employing a quantitative research design, the study collects data through standardized questionnaires to analyze variables including family dynamics, socioeconomic factors, and access to support services. By focusing on the specific socio-cultural and economic context of Gombe Metropolis, this research seeks to inform policy decisions, community programs, and intervention strategies tailored to the needs of children from divorced families.The study highlights that family structure, socioeconomic conditions, and community support significantly influence children's behavior. It finds that divorce increases the risk of delinquency, aggression, and emotional detachment among children. However, strong family support, education, and community programs can help reduce these negative effects. The study provides recommendations to guide policies and interventions aimed at promoting stable family environments and supporting vulnerable children in Gombe Metropolis.

Keywords: Divorce, juvenile delinquency, behavior, children

Introduction

Divorce is a pervasive global phenomenon that profoundly impacts families worldwide, precipitating complex emotional and financial consequences. As individuals navigate the multifaceted process of separation, they often encounter a myriad of legal, social, and personal challenges that necessitate significant adjustments and efforts to rebuild their lives (Ali Bukhtiar & Iqbal, 2025). Research has consistently demonstrated that children of divorced parents are at an increased risk of experiencing emotional and behavioral problems, including juvenile delinquency. This association is often attributed to the heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and insecurity that children encounter as a consequence of parental divorce, which can profoundly impact their emotional and psychological well-being (Sari & Arga, 2025). The disintegration of family structure can compromise parental supervision, guidance, and support, thereby increasing the likelihood of delinquent behavior among children. The absence of a stable and nurturing environment can precipitate feelings of insecurity and abandonment, leading some children to seek validation and acceptance through maladaptive peer relationships. Therefore, it is essential to address the underlying issues affecting family dynamics to promote healthier relationships and foster positive behavioral outcomes in young individuals (Andrejić, 2024). According to the World Health Organization (2019), children of divorced parents are at an increased risk of engaging in risk-taking behaviors, including substance abuse and violence. This finding underscores the imperative for policymakers and practitioners to develop evidence-based interventions tailored to support children of divorced parents, with the ultimate goal of preventing juvenile delinquency and promoting positive youth development.

Divorce in West Africa, particularly Nigeria, has a significant impact on children's behaviour. Research indicates that children from divorced families are more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviours, such as aggression, anxiety, and depression. Emotional trauma, low self-esteem, and difficulty forming healthy relationships are common issues (Roza & Silva, 2024). Academic challenges are also higher for children from separated families, leading to dropout rates and social struggles. Delinquency and crime are more likely among children from unstable families, with some being misdiagnosed or ignored by those around them (Kroese & Rouwendal, 2021). Consequently, it is crucial for communities and policymakers to address these challenges by providing support systems and resources for affected families, ensuring that children receive the guidance and care they need to thrive despite their circumstances.

In Gombe Metropolis, the rising divorce rate has sparked worries regarding behavioral development and well-being. Children with divorced parents suffer from emotional and psychological problems, including anxiety, despair, poor self-esteem, emotional trauma, and mood regulation problems. Delinquency, violence, substance misuse, and hostility are examples of behavioural issues. Academic difficulties include worse performance, a higher chance of dropping out, and challenges establishing positive relationships. The likelihood of financial hardships, unfavourable peer pressure, and child abuse is increased by social and environmental

variables (Musa & Sagir, 2016). However, the lack of effective support systems and interventions for children from divorced families has contributed to the growing problem of juvenile delinquency. Additionally, cultural and societal norms stigmatising divorce and blaming single parents have created a culture of silence and shame, making it difficult for children from divorced families to openly discuss their experiences and seek help.

This study investigates the impact of parental divorce on juvenile delinquent behavior among children in Gombe Metropolis, with a specific focus on the causes of divorce and its effects on criminal behavior. The research examines the moderating role of socio-economic factors and community support systems in mitigating the adverse effects of divorce on children. By elucidating these dynamics, this study aims to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers and social workers to develop targeted interventions supporting affected families.

The study's objectives include designing parenting programs tailored to the unique needs of divorced children, thereby contributing to the reduction of juvenile delinquency in Gombe Metropolis. Furthermore, this research contributes to the field of family sociology by advancing theoretical understandings of juvenile delinquency and highlighting the significance of family factors, including divorce. The findings are expected to inform policy decisions and foster interdisciplinary collaboration, ultimately enhancing our understanding of the complex relationships between divorce and juvenile delinquency.

Literature Review

This section of the study analysed academic content in depth concerning the impact of divorc e on children's behaviour.

The Impact of Divorce on delinquent Behavior among Children

The impact of divorce on children's delinquent behaviour is a complex issue influenced by psychological, social, and environmental factors. Research suggests that children from divorced families may experience challenges that increase their risk of engaging in criminal behaviour. Key considerations include stress and anxiety, reduced parental supervision, inconsistent parenting styles, financial strain, social stigma, and substance use, all of which can exacerbate feelings of instability and lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms. Furthermore, the quality of relationships with both parents post-divorce can significantly affect a child's emotional well-being and behaviour, underscoring the importance of supportive interventions during and after the separation process (Weaver & Schofield, 2014).

Emotional distress can lead to feelings of anger, sadness, or insecurity, which can sometimes lead to delinquency. Parental supervision and involvement may be reduced post-divorce, leading to decreased monitoring of children's activities (Sabour & Yaacob, 2011). Family disruption can lead to feelings of isolation and delinquency, with parental conflict, substance abuse, and economic hardship exacerbated. Research indicates a correlation between family instability and increased likelihood of delinquency and substance use among adolescents. Early legal substance use is linked to a higher risk of illicit drug use and criminal activities. Factors like family

dynamics, socioeconomic status, and parental behavior moderate this relationship. However, family disruption can be mitigated with timely interventions and support systems (Burstein, 2012)

To mitigate the adverse effects of divorce on children, effective support systems and interventions are crucial. These may include establishing a supportive community and social network, implementing conflict reduction strategies, promoting economic stability, and providing targeted programs to prevent delinquent behaviors and address substance abuse issues. (Huff & Hartenstein, 2020)

Nelson et al. (2024) conducted a study to investigate the link between parenting quality and juvenile delinquency. The research focused on key factors such as parenting styles, communication between parents and children, family structure, and socio-economic status. The study's primary objective was to identify how variations in parenting quality contribute to juvenile delinquency. The researchers used a descriptive research design, examining the characteristics of the population being studied and examining the relationships between variables of interest. The study sample consisted of 123 juvenile delinquents from the Children Correctional Center in Benin City, Nigeria. Data was collected through structured interviews and questionnaires, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and backgrounds. The study found significant correlations between certain parenting practices and the likelihood of juvenile delinquency. Specifically, authoritative parenting, characterized by a balance of warmth and discipline, was associated with lower rates of delinquent behavior. In contrast, neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles were linked to higher rates of delinquency. Effective communication between parents and children emerged as a critical factor in preventing delinquency, with open and supportive communication reducing the likelihood of children engaging in anti-social behavior.

The study highlighted the impact of socio-economic status on juvenile delinquency, noting that economic hardship and limited access to resources exacerbate the risk of delinquent behavior. To mitigate the impact of poor parenting quality on juvenile delinquency, the research offered several recommendations: Emphasize Effective Parenting Styles: Parents should be encouraged to adopt authoritative parenting practices that combine warmth, support, and clear disciplinary boundaries. ii. Improve Communication: Efforts should be made to enhance communication between parents and children, fostering an environment where children feel heard and supported. iii. Address Socio-Economic Factors: Policies and interventions should aim to alleviate economic hardship and provide resources and support to families in need, including access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

In conclusion, Nelson et al. provide valuable insights into the link between parenting quality and juvenile delinquency, highlighting the importance of effective parenting styles, communication, and addressing socio-economic challenges, (Nelson, 2024).

Folorunsho et al. (2024) conducted a study on the impact of parenting styles and family structures on juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. The research aimed to advocate for more effective parenting

styles and incorporate family dynamics into policymaking to address the root causes of delinquent behavior. The study employed a qualitative research approach grounded in Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their social environment, including their family. The study involved a comprehensive review of existing literature and case studies on family dynamics and juvenile delinquency. Key findings revealed that authoritative and supportive parenting is associated with lower rates of juvenile delinquency, while neglectful and authoritarian parenting tends to correlate with higher rates. Family structures, such as single-parent households and families experiencing economic hardship, play a significant role in shaping youth behavior. These family dynamics can either exacerbate or mitigate the likelihood of delinquency, depending on the level of support and guidance provided by the parents.

Folorunsho et al. offer several recommendations to combat juvenile delinquency: encouraging positive parenting styles, prioritizing family dynamics in policies, and promoting awareness on effective parenting. However, the study acknowledges several limitations, including geographical limitations, population participation, and concentration on particular factors related to parenting styles and family structures.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the vital role of family dynamics in shaping adolescent behavior and addressing juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. By advocating for positive parenting styles and integrating family considerations into policymaking, the study provides a framework for reducing delinquent behavior among youths (Folorunsho, 2024).

Zhou's (2023) explores the psychological impact of parental divorce on children, focusing on both immediate and long-term developmental outcomes. Using a literature review methodology, the study identifies key psychological effects such as increased anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues in children immediately following divorce. It also examines long-term consequences, such as academic challenges, difficulties in forming stable relationships, and potential mental health issues in adulthood. The study provides recommendations for mitigating the negative effects of parental divorce from multiple perspectives: family, school, and individual. Family-wise, maintaining effective communication and emotional support can reduce adverse impacts. School-wise, implementing counseling services and peer support groups can address emotional and social needs. Individually, encouraging healthy coping mechanisms and access to mental health resources can promote resilience and well-being.

However, the study has certain limitations. One notable limitation is the reliance on previously conducted research, which means that the study does not present original data. This reliance on secondary data may limit the ability to draw definitive conclusions and make specific generalizations. Additionally, the diversity of the studies reviewed, in terms of geographical location, cultural context, and time period, may affect the generalisability of the findings. Changing societal norms surrounding divorce, such as increased acceptance and changes in family

structures, also pose challenges to the applicability of the conclusions drawn from the literature review.

In conclusion, Zhou's study offers valuable insights into the impact of parental divorce on children and offers practical recommendations for mitigating these effects. However, further research, including primary data collection and analysis, is needed to enhance understanding and applicability of the findings in different contexts (Zhou, 2023).

Richard Jessor Problem Behavior Theory (1960)

Richard Jessor, an American psychologist, developed the Problem Behavior Theory (PBT) in the 1960s to understand adolescent problem behaviors. PBT posits that problem behaviors, such as delinquency, substance use, and promiscuity, are a result of a combination of factors, including personality factors, social environment, and behavioral factors. Its basic assumptions include that problem behaviors are interrelated, that personality, social environment, and behavioral factors all contribute to the development of problem behaviors, and that problem behaviors serve as coping mechanisms. PBT can be applied to the topic of divorce and its impact on juvenile delinquent behavior in children. Parental conflict and divorce can contribute to a social environment that increases the likelihood of problem behaviors in children. Children's personality factors, such as impulsivity and rebelliousness, may influence their likelihood of engaging in problem behaviors following parental divorce.

Problem behavior theory has strengths such as a comprehensive framework, empirical support, and practical applications in fields such as psychology, education, and public health. However, it has criticisms, including oversimplification, lack of clear boundaries, and limited generalizability.

In conclusion, PBT provides a comprehensive understanding of how various factors contribute to problem behaviors in youth, emphasizing the role of cultural norms, societal expectations, and developmental transitions. However, it may face limitations in its generalizability to other populations or contexts.

Problem Behavior Theory (PBT) provides a conceptual framework for understanding delinquent behaviors in adolescents, particularly in the context of the Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria. This theoretical model delineates three primary systems: the Personality System, the Perceived Environment System, and the Behavior System. According to PBT, risk factors such as emotional distress can contribute to delinquent behavior, while protective factors like supportive relationships can mitigate its impact. By integrating PBT into research, investigators can develop targeted interventions tailored to the needs of at-risk youth. However, further research is warranted to elucidate the complex relationship between divorce and juvenile delinquency in the Gombe Metropolis, taking into account cultural and socioeconomic factors. A comprehensive investigation into the challenges and protective factors faced by adolescents in this context could

inform the development of targeted interventions and support services, ultimately enhancing the well-being of this vulnerable population

Methodology

Area of the Study

This study is situated in the Gombe Metropolis, a prominent urban center in the northeastern region of Nigeria. As the administrative and economic hub of Gombe State, the Gombe Metropolis is characterized by a high level of economic activity and population density, rendering it a strategic location for investigating the research objectives

Population of the study

This study's target population comprises children from divorced families, their parents, and community stakeholders in the Gombe Metropolis, including social service providers, educators, juvenile justice professionals, and religious/community leaders. According to estimates from the Gombe State Ministry of Women Affairs, the population size is approximately 1000. Using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table, a sample of 375 respondents were selected from the target population to participate in the study.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing surveys to collect numerical data on the impact of parental divorce on juvenile delinquent behavior among children in the Gombe Metropolis. Standardized questionnaires were used to measure delinquent behaviors and potential influencing factors, including family dynamics, socioeconomic status, and access to support services. The copies of questionnaires were personally administered and collected by the researchers. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, providing a comprehensive overview of the relationships between parental divorce and juvenile delinquent behavior.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: *A summary of demographic characteristics of the study's respondents*

		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	235	64.4
	Female	130	35.6
	Total	365	100.0
Marital Status	Married	238	65.2
	Single	116	31.8
	Divorced	11	3.0
	Total	365	100.0
Educational Level	SSCE	152	41.6
	Diploma/NCE	122	33.4
	HND/Degree	66	18.1
	Postgraduate	25	6.8
	Total	365	100.0
Occupation	Student	40	11.0
	Civil Servant	152	41.6
	Self Employed	173	47.4
	Total	365	100.0
Age	26-30 years	38	10.4
	31-35 years	84	23.0
	36-40 years	125	34.2
	41-45 years	10	2.7
	46-50 years	31	8.5
	51-55 years	29	7.9
	56-60 years	22	6.0
	60 and above	26	7.1
	Total	365	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2025

The demographic composition of the respondents surveyed in the field study reveals several key characteristics. Regarding sex, the data indicates a clear male preponderance, with 235 participants identifying as male, constituting 64.4% of the total sample. In contrast, 130 participants were female, representing 35.6%. This disparity highlights a gender imbalance within the participant group.

The marital status distribution shows that the majority of participants, numbering 238 and accounting for 65.2%, were married. A notable portion, 116 individuals (31.8%), reported being single. The smallest category comprised those who were divorced, with only 11 participants, making up 3.0% of the total. This distribution underscores the prevalence of marriage within the surveyed population.

In terms of educational attainment, the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) was the most common qualification, held by 152 participants, or 41.6%. Following this, 122 participants (33.4%) had a Diploma or National Certificate of Education (NCE). A smaller segment, 66 participants (18.1%), possessed an HND or a degree, and the least represented group was those with postgraduate qualifications, numbering 25 and accounting for 6.8%. This data illustrates the educational diversity of the participants, with a skew towards secondary and diploma level qualifications.

The occupational breakdown reveals that the largest category of participants was self-employed, with 173 individuals, representing 47.4%. Civil servants constituted the second-largest group, with 152 participants, or 41.6%. Students made up the smallest occupational group, with 40 participants, accounting for 11.0%. This distribution indicates a workforce-heavy sample, with self-employment being the most prevalent.

The age distribution of the participants shows a concentration in the middle age brackets. The largest single age group was 36-40 years, with 125 participants, representing 34.2%. The 31-35 years age group was also substantial, with 84 participants (23.0%). The 26-30 years group accounted for 38 participants (10.4%). Older age groups were less represented, with 10 participants (2.7%) in the 41-45 years bracket, 31 participants (8.5%) in the 46-50 years bracket, 29 participants (7.9%) in the 51-55 years bracket, 22 participants (6.0%) in the 56-60 years bracket, and 26 participants (7.1%) being 60 years and above. This age distribution suggests that the survey predominantly captured the views and characteristics of individuals in their economically active middle years.

Causes of Divorce in Gombe Metropolis

The table two (2) below presents the responses on the causes of divorce in Gombe Metropolis

Table 2: *Causes of Divorce*

Response	Financial Issues	Lack of Communication	Infidelity	Domestic Violence
Strongly Agree	116 (31.8%)	136 (37.3%)	96 (26.3%)	125 (34.2%)
Agree	167 (45.8%)	175 (47.9%)	201 (55.1%)	193 (52.9%)
Neutral	9 (2.5%)	14 (3.8%)	33 (9.0%)	25 (6.8%)
Disagree	51 (14.0%)	21 (5.8%)	24 (6.6%)	15 (4.1%)
Strongly Disagree	22 (6.0%)	19 (5.2%)	11 (3.0%)	7 (1.9%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data presented in the table indicates that respondents in Gombe metropolis perceive several key factors as major contributors to divorce. Notably, lack of communication emerged as

the most prominent cause, with 85.2% of participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing that it leads to marital breakdown. This suggests that poor interpersonal interaction and unresolved conflicts within marriages significantly strain relationships. Domestic violence followed closely, with 87.1% agreement, highlighting that abuse within the household whether emotional, physical, or psychological is a critical issue leading to separation. Infidelity was also identified as a major cause, with 81.4% agreement, suggesting that breaches of trust continue to erode marital stability. Financial issues, though slightly less cited than the others, still saw 77.6% agreement, indicating that economic pressures and financial incompatibility are influential stressors in marriages.

These findings are crucial within the context of the study, which investigates the impact of juvenile delinquent behavior in Gombe. High rates of divorce, driven by the aforementioned causes, contribute to family instability, which in turn affects children's social and emotional development.

Impact of Divorce on Criminal Behaviors among Children in Gombe Metropolis

Table three (3) below shows the summary of responses on the perceived impact of divorce on children's criminal behaviors in Gombe Metropolis.

Table 3: *Impact of Divorce on Children Criminal behaviour*

Response	Increase in Delinquency	Aggressive Tendencies	Negative Peer Influence	Emotional Detachment
Strongly Agree	96 (26.3%)	90 (24.7%)	84 (23.0%)	117 (32.1%)
Agree	203 (55.6%)	191 (52.3%)	179 (49.0%)	159 (43.6%)
Neutral/Undecided	36 (9.9%)	36 (9.9%)	44 (12.1%)	49 (13.4%)
Disagree	21 (5.8%)	37 (10.1%)	42 (11.5%)	27 (7.4%)
Strongly Disagree	9 (2.5%)	11 (3.0%)	16 (4.4%)	13 (3.6%)
Total	365 (100%)	365 (100%)	365 (100%)	365 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results of the study reveal strong associations between parental divorce and various indicators of juvenile delinquency among children in Gombe Metropolis. A significant portion of the respondents over 81.9% either strongly agreed (26.3%) or agreed (55.6%) that divorce contributes to an increase in delinquent behavior among children. This suggests that the absence of a stable, two-parent household may compromise supervision and discipline, potentially leading children to engage in antisocial or unlawful behavior. Similarly, a majority of respondents acknowledged a link between divorce and the development of **aggressive or violent tendencies** in children. Approximately 77% agreed or strongly agreed that such behaviors may emerge as a result of emotional strain and a lack of proper parental guidance. Only a small fraction (13.1%) disagreed or remained undecided, reinforcing the perceived strength of this connection.

Exposure to negative peer influence also emerged as a significant concern. About 72% of participants believed that children from divorced homes are more vulnerable to bad influences, likely due to the emotional vacuum and lack of consistent parental monitoring. Peer groups may become substitutes for familial bonds, but without positive role models, these children may fall into delinquent social circles. Furthermore, emotional detachment from parents was seen as a critical factor influencing delinquent behavior. A combined 75.7% of respondents reported that children often become emotionally distant following a divorce, seeking solace and identity within peer groups—some of which may be delinquent in nature. This finding highlights the psychological toll of divorce and how it disrupts healthy emotional development.

Overall, the study underscores a consistent belief among respondents that divorce plays a major role in shaping juvenile delinquency. The cumulative data reflect a strong public perception that family breakdown has a profound impact not only on children's academic and emotional well-being but also on their behavioral development.

This study examines the demographic characteristics of respondents in Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria, with a specific focus on the antecedents of divorce and its consequential impact on juvenile delinquency. The findings reveal that the primary causes of divorce among the respondents are lack of communication, domestic violence, infidelity, and financial difficulties. Furthermore, the study's results indicate that parental divorce is associated with an increased risk of delinquency, aggressive behavior, negative peer influence, and emotional detachment among children.

Conclusion

This study examines the profound impact of parental divorce on juvenile delinquent behavior among children in Gombe Metropolis. The findings underscore the critical role of family dynamics, socioeconomic factors, and community support in influencing children's behavioral development. Specifically, the research reveals that divorce is associated with increased delinquency, aggressive tendencies, and emotional detachment in children. Nevertheless, the study highlights the potential mitigating effects of family support, education, and community-based programs in preventing and managing juvenile delinquency. The recommendations aimed to inform policy and intervention strategies that promoted stable family environments, supported children's emotional and educational needs, and fostered community engagement. By shedding light on the complex issues surrounding divorce and juvenile delinquency, this research provided valuable insights for stakeholders, policymakers, and practitioners working to support vulnerable children and families in Gombe Metropolis.

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EFFECT OF FOLLOW-UP REHABILITATION COUNSELLING ON DRUG ADDICTS IN NASARAWA STATE

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Abstract

Follow-up rehabilitation counselling on drug addicted persons should be a major concern in curbing the issues of drug abuse, globally. This study examined relevance of post recovery care or routine checks on drug addicts who underwent rehabilitation sessions, with the aim of establishing the state of the client's recovery and how he/she fits back into the family and the society at large. Quasi-experimental design was adopted in this study. A Population of fifty (50) rehabilitees from NDLEA and psychiatric hospital in the State. The sample of ten (10) rehabilitees was selected using purposive and simple random techniques. Test questions whose validity and reliability yielded 0.76 and 0.89 indices, were administered to the rehabilitees in the first and second instances (pre and post test). Similarly, mean and use standard deviation were used in the answering the research question, while t test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05alpha. The result shows that after care (follow-up) on drug addicts who went through rehabilitation is necessary in reducing the risk of relapse. It also recommend that families, counsellors, NGOs and communities have their roles in checking on recovery individuals and stressing the need to stop stigmatizing subjects who went through rehabilitation. This is with a view to building a positive character and personality in the client.

Key words: Follow-up, Rehabilitation counselling, Drug Abuse, Addiction, Clients

Introduction

The problem of drug abuse has intensified into an epidermis with serious health consequences, requiring accelerated effort towards treatment and rehabilitation. World health

organization has organized means of assisting drug dependent persons either in hospital settings or outside the hospital with the aim of making the clients and patients recover normal (WHO,2009).

Many treatment models may have their roots in previous methods, however, aversion therapy is still used today through most often used medication like disulfiram that discourages individuals addicted to alcohol from drinking, other drugs treatment programs includes: Detoxification, Prevention programs, Outpatient programs, Inpatient/Residential programs, Transitional programs, aftercare/ follow-up and recovery support programs (NIDA, 2015). Modern best practices in the drug rehabilitation treatment field include after care services, aimed at following up with addicts even after they graduate a recovery program, through check-in calls, alumni event e.t.c to continue their recovery even after relocation back home. Some drug rehabilitation programs even offer sober companionship or' shadowing 'services for an extra fee, allowing recovering drug addicts to receive one- on- one support and guidance as they reenter their lives in newfound sobriety (Siringi ,2003).

After care provides a continuation of counselling and support once the drug rehab program has been successfully completed. Many after care programs insist that clients be sober for a period of time before entering into aftercare service, but other aftercare programs may be extensions of in-patient drug rehabilitation programs. It is important to know that there is an ongoing recovery process that takes place in a person's life. Certainly there are benchmarks, but the client must avoid the idea that he/she has been totally cured as a result of completing drug rehab treatment. Aftercare provides services which will make transitioning into a new life with new habits and new ways of thinking more successful with less risk of relapse (Promises, 2018).

Aftercare is a key component in living a successful life of recovery and sobriety. It is the bridge which helps client keep holds of the things they've learned and gained as they embark upon a new way of living. The period of time directly following rehabilitation treatment is the most fragile time for recovering addicts. Treatment provides a safe and structured environment that supports a sober lifestyle, but the real world is full of temptation and triggers that threaten sobriety at every turn. After care helps patient transition to the outside and applies the lessons they learned in rehabilitation centre with the support of professionals and other addicts in recovery. Other than psychological therapies in rehab, the professionals are mandated with equipping the rehabilitees with crucial life skills. Case manager and Counnsellors help the rehabilitee's life management issues such as living arrangements, employment, relationships, emotional healing and continued skill building in maintaining sobriety. Peer support groups allow you to connect with other individuals just like you who can help keep you on track toward your goal of sobriety (VanEtten, Neumark & Anthony, 1999).

Lifetime after care is one such option that typically involves weekly or regularly scheduled by an experienced substance abuse counsellor. The counsellor helps client meet his unique

recovery plans, provides guidance as one examines his client recovery for moving forward, he gets the feedback and support of not only the counsellor but also the other who may contribute to his life time, after care program include alumni of treatment programs, families and the community (Walker,2018).

Statement of the Problem

Drug abuse has reached an epidermis proportion around the globe and is being considered now as one of the dreadful problem of this country, crossing all social, economic, cultural and political boundaries.

It is obvious that drug addicts are involved in various antisocial activities and deviant behaviour causing problems in our urban life and appears as obstacles to our socioeconomic and cultural growth and development, hence it is our moral and social responsibility to rectify the drug addicts and bring them back from their life-killing habit, deviant behavior to normal life and rehabilitate them in society as productive ones.

Non- Governmental Organization (NGO), members of the civil societies should work in hand especially the social workers in regards to social integration with the family and the community at large, the client whom has undergoes drug rehabilitation need not to be left alone without proper monitoring during recovery. It has also been discovered that clients who pass through rehabilitation are allow to mingle with their former environment, friends and peer, if such will happen, then there is the need for proper monitor by the counselor, family etc. Follow-up will help client gain back his normal drug free life, help reduce stigmatization effect and relapse.

In Nasarawa State for instance, drugs addicted persons who received counselling, brief intervention and rehabilitation services by the NDLEA in 2022 and 2023 annual reports have it that, a total of number of sixty six (66) in 2022 and three hundred and seventy nine (379) in 2023 (NDLEA,2022 and 2223). This indicated that drug addiction is on the increase on a daily bases and possibly some that went through rehabilitation relapse back to their drug habit due to improper monitoring (follow-up), living parents in a state meeting up with the dilemma associated with addiction behaviour and financial implication in treatment of drug dependents (WHO,2009). Parents and communities have to design recovery meetings, reinforcement and remain connected as possible with the client; this will reduce recovery challenges which most clients find as impossible to get out of severe addiction recovery, other than psychological therapies in rehab, the professionals are mandated with equipping the rehabilitees with crucial life skills. Case manager and Counnsellors help the rehabilitee's life management issues such as living arrangements, employment, relationships, emotional healing and continued skill building in maintaining sobriety. Peer support groups allow you to connect with other individuals just like you who can help keep you on track toward your goal of sobriety (VanEtten, Neumark & Anthony, 1999).

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by an experienced substance abuse counsellor. The counsellor helps client meet his unique recovery plans, provides guidance as one examines his client recovery for moving forward, he gets the feedback and support of not only the counsellor but also the other who may contribute to his life time, after care program include alumni of treatment programs, families and the community (Walker,2018).

Drug Rehabilitation Counselling

Drugs have been abused for hundreds of years all over the world, their effects have been used, and there were always those who abused them, which led to full-blown addiction and the bevy of side effects that come with it. As the physical and mental health implication of addiction became clearer, rehabilitations in the United States dates back hundreds of years (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2012). In 1964 the New York State inebriate Asylum, the first hospital intended to solely treat alcoholism as a mental health condition, was founded. As the public began to view alcoholism and related drug abuse more seriously, more community groups and sober houses began appearing (Hall, 2010)

Rehabilitation counselling is a systematic process which assists persons with physical, mental, developmental, cognitive, and emotional disabilities to achieve their personal, career, and independent living goals in the most integrated setting possible through the application of the counseling process. The counselling process involves communication, goal setting, and beneficial growth or change through self-advocacy, psychological, vocational, social, and behavioral interventions. The specific techniques and modalities utilized within this rehabilitation counseling process may include, but are not limited to; assessment and appraisal, diagnosis and treatment planning, career (vocational) counselling, individual and group counselling treatment interventions focused on facilitating adjustments to the medical and psychosocial impact of disability, case management, referral, and service coordination, program evaluation and research(NIDA, 2015).

Short term residential treatment, which typically focuses on detoxification as well as providing initial intensive counselling required per week decreases. The intensive out-patient (IOP) is a good option for those serious about abstaining from drug and alcohol, but that still need to be able to work and perform daily responsibilities. An IOP may require a multiple sessions for a few hours each week to conduct counselling sessions, group therapy, relapse prevention education and attendance in a 12-step or similar recovery support group.(SAMHSA,2018)

iii. Continuing Care: continuing care groups such as Alcohol Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous are ongoing support resources to help and solidify their commitment to sobriety. The groups are typically facilitated by a licensed therapist and meet weekly. Some continuing care groups may be gender specific or age-specific, and others may focus on a particular aspect of recovery (Williams, 2018)

It includes a wide variety of programs for patients who visit a behavioral health counselor on

a regular schedule. Most of the programs involve individual or group drug counseling, or both. These programs typically offer forms of behavioral therapy such as:

1. Cognitive-behavioral therapy, which helps patients recognize, avoid, and cope with the situations in which they are most likely to use drugs or teaches a person how to recognize mood, thought and situations that stimulates drug craving. A therapist helps the person avoid these triggers, and replace negative thoughts and feelings with healthier ones that are more consistent with sobriety. The skills learned in cognitive behavioural therapy can last a lifetime, making it a potentially powerful method of drug abuse treatment. However, not all therapists are trained in cognitive behavioural techniques, which can be complex (Goldberg, 2016).
2. Multidimensional family therapy—developed for adolescents with drug abuse problems as well as their families—which addresses a range of influences on their drug abuse patterns and is designed to improve overall family functioning. There are several potential benefits of family or couple therapy; Family can act as a powerful force for change in the addicted person's life. Including family member can increase the likelihood a person will stay in therapy and each family member can begin to heal the damage their loved one's addiction has caused in their own life.
3. Motivational interviewing, which makes the most of people's readiness to change their behaviour and enter treatment. It is also a traditional therapy for drug abuse treatment involved confrontation. (NIH, NIDA SAMHSA, 2016).

Follow- up Services

Follow up is one fundamental services offer in guidance and counselling aimed at monitoring client and collecting information about them long after they graduate from a program such rehabilitation, Follow-up means monitoring client and collecting information about them long after they graduate from a program. Most clients disconnect with the treatment center for various reasons. Many begin to live normal lives and do not recall the painful years of addiction. Some will relapse and will not come back. Others will keep contact with the center or the self- help group. Ensuring follow-up of maximum number of clients is a good idea for everyone concerned the recovery addict, his family, the center and counsellor. As a counsellor you will want to know what become of the clients, and whether they have managed to stay healthy after graduating from the program (Albert, 2012).

Beddoe, (2017) is of the opinion that after care is a continue support after Rehabilitation, after care programs can help prevent relapse and help you stay focused on your recovery , these programs can include 12-step programs, support group counselling. The post- rehab after is any treatment a person receives after participating in a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program. This treatment has been shown to be extremely effective in helping people in recovery stay on track. It decreases the probability they will relapse and return to their addictive behaviour.

Additional support can always be found by continuing to attend `12-step meetings. Many

people in recovery continue to attend 12-step meetings as a way to help others; they want to provide support to people who have just began the path of recovery, just as they found support when they began their journey to sobriety. Client may choose to attend meetings for recovery reinforcement, and to remain connected to the supportive community he became part of while in his aftercare program (McKay, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of follow-up rehabilitation counselling on drug addicted persons, was guided by the research question;

What is the effect of follow-up rehabilitation counselling on drug addicted persons?' and the

Null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance

There is no significant effect of follow-up rehabilitation counselling on substance addicted persons.

Theoretical Framework

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Behavioural Family Therapy

An additional cognitively-based model of substance abuse recovery has been offered by Aaron Beck, the father of cognitive therapy and championed in his 1993 book, Cognitive Therapy of Substance Abuse.(Beck, *Wright, Newman,& Liese, 2001).* This theory rests upon the assumption that addicted individuals possess core beliefs, often not accessible to immediate consciousness (unless the patient is also depressed) Aaron approach emphasize teaching clients self- management skills and how to restructure their thoughts, the clients learn to use these techniques to control their lives to deal effectively with present and future problems and function well without ongoing therapy. According to Fatoye (2002), cognitive processes cover numerous mental activities such as beliefs, ideas, schemas, values opinions, assumptions among other sare likely to lead addictive behaviours including anticipatory beliefs, relief oriented beliefs, automatic thoughts, facilitative beliefs and instrumental beliefs. These core beliefs, such as "I am undesirable," activate a system of addictive beliefs that result in imagined anticipatory benefits of substance use and, consequentially, craving. Once craving has been activated, permissive beliefs ("I can handle getting high just this one more time") are facilitated. Once a permissive set of beliefs have been activated, then the individual will activate drug-seeking and drug-ingesting behaviors. The cognitive therapist's job is to uncover this underlying system of beliefs, analyze it with the patient, and thereby demonstrate its functionality. As with any cognitive-behavioral therapy, home work assignments and behavioral exercises serve to solidify what is learned and discussed during treatment *(Peterborough, 2016).*

Cognitive behavioural treatments (CBT) and behavioural family counselling (BFC) include individual and group approaches that involve relationship focused, interventions in addition to skills training, cbt and bfc are based primarily on social learning theory, which posits that

substance misuse is a learned behaviour whose onset and continuation is included by positive experiences about the effects of use and family members 'and friends' experiences, norms and behaviour and on stress and coping theory, which suggests that life stressors are likely to impel substance use among efficacy and poor coping skills and who try to avoid experiencing distress and alienation.

CBT focuses primarily on reducing patients positive expectancy and self efficacy to resist substance misuse, and improving their skills in coping with daily life stressors, including relapse inducing situations and BFC focuses on teaching communication skills to increase family cohesion and conflicts, and plan enjoyable, shared substance-free activities. It typically includes interventions to build support and provide rewards for abstinence and to institute ongoing monitoring with behavioural change agreements and/or sobriety contracts in which the affected individual either takes a medication (such as Antabuse or Naltrexone) while the spouse is observing or restates a commitment to sobriety (Babor and Del Boca, 2003; Brown et al, 2002)

Twelve-Step Facilitation (TSF) Theory

The disease model of addiction has long contended the maladaptive patterns of alcohol and substance use displayed by addicted individuals are the result of a lifelong disease that is biological in origin and exacerbated by environmental contingencies. This conceptualization renders the individual essentially powerless over his or her problematic behaviors and unable to remain sober by him or herself, much as individuals with a terminal illness are unable to fight the disease by themselves without medication. Behavioral treatment, therefore, necessarily requires individuals to admit their addiction, renounce their former lifestyle, and seek a supportive social network who can help them remain sober. Such approaches are the essential features of twelve-step programs, originally published in the book Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in 1939 (AAWS, 2001) . Moreover, TSF patients who are more committed to AA and abstinence and stronger intentions to avoid high- risk situations are likely to achieve abstinence after treatment (Morgenstern *et al,* 2015).These approaches have met considerable amounts of criticism, coming from opponents who disapprove of the spiritual-religious orientation on both psychological (Badura,1999) and legal (Wood, 2006) grounds. Nonetheless, despite this criticism, outcome studies have revealed that affiliation with twelve-step programs predicts abstinence success at 1-year follow-up for alcoholism. Different results have been reached for other drugs, with the twelve steps bring those addicted to the physiologically and psychologically addicting uploads, for which maintenance therapies are the gold standard of care (Moos, Finney, Ouimette & Suchinsky, 1999; Johnson *et al,* 2006)

According to social control theory, strong bonds with family, friend, school, work, religion and other aspects of traditional society motivate individuals to engage in responsible behaviour and refrain from substance use and other deviant pursuits. These bonds encompass monitoring or

supervision and directing behaviour towards acceptable goal and pursuits. When such social bonds are weak or absent, individuals are less likely to adhere to conventional standard and tend to engage in undesirable behaviour, such as the miss use of alcohol and drugs. The main causes of weak attachments to existing social standards is inadequate monitoring and shaping of behaviour, including families that lacks cohesion and structure, friends who espouse deviant values and engage in disruptive behaviour, and lack of supervision and vigilance in school and work settings (Hirschis, 2012).

Methodology

The research design for this study is quasi- experimental design. It involves pre-test and post-test. The design was used because it lacks full laboratory control. The researcher adopted randomized pretest and post test design because it will help to compare the results of the test, as well as measure the degree of change occurring as a result of treatment or intervention. The design is illustrated as follows:

E.G = 01 X 02,

Where E.G = Experimental Group

01 = Pretesting Observation,

02 = Post testing Observation

X = Treatment Intervention (positive or negative)

The population for this study consists of fifty (50) rehabilitee undergoing therapeutic counselling in NDLEA and psychiatric hospital in Nasarawa state. A sample size of ten (10) rehabilitees was selected for this experiment. Purposive and Random sampling techniques were employed in the study. Two rehabilitation centers were randomly selected using random sampling technique. Purposive sampling method was used in this study; this allowed the researcher to select those participants who were to provide the richest information and those who manifested the characteristics of most interest to the researcher. Objective test comprising of 4 items whose validity and reliability test yielded 0.76 and 0.89 indices, on effect of follow-up rehabilitation counselling was given to the rehabilitees twice (pre-post test). The research questions were answered with mean score and standard deviation while the hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significant by comparing the t -calculate and t- table

Research Question 1

What are the effects of follow-up rehabilitation counselling on substance addicted persons?

To answer the above question, the client scores from pretest and posttest were used to calculate the arithmetic mean and the standard deviation, Excel and analogue (manual) was applied to obtain the result in table

Table 1:*Effects of follow-up rehabilitation counselling on substance addicted persons*

S/N	Items	N	X Pretest	STD	X Posttest	STD	Remark
9.	Continue care after treatment helps to overcome the temptation of returning to substance use	10	2	4.049	2	1.264	accepted
10,	Strict monitoring helps me to put the new Found skills in to practice.	10	2	2.000	2	1.264	accepted .
11.	Follow-up rehabilitation helps me to Completely quite from my addiction habit.	10	2	2.530	2	2.234	accepted
12.	Follow-up care might be a distraction and make me pretend that I am okay.	10	1.2	1.519	1.4	2.000	accepted
	Cluster Mean	1.8	2.524	1.4	1.690		

Table 1 shows that respondent rated all the items 1-4 in the cluster within the cut-off –point of (2.00) .While mean and standard deviation were used for agree or disagree for rating the effects of follow-up rehabilitation counselling in Nasarawa State. The cluster mean of 1.80 was obtain which was accepted as positive effect of follow-up on rehabilitation counselling of substance addicted persons

Table 2: *Two tail t-test of effect on pretest and posttest scores of clients on rehabilitation counselling*

Treatment	Test	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	Remark
Pre-test	1.8	1.588					
			18	0.017	2.101		
Post test	1.4	1.300					

The result presented in Table 2 shows that t-tabulated (2.101) is greater than t-calculate

(0.017) at 0.05 alpha and 18 degree of freedom. Indicating that there is no significant effect in the mean score of client pre-test and post test who undergo strict follow-up counselling. Thus the hypothesis was rejected implying that there is a significant effect of follow-up rehabilitation counseling on drug addicted persons in Nasarawa state.

To test the null hypothesis, the mean score for the pretest and posttest of the experimental group were compared using separate variance, Excel and analogue(manual) was used and the result obtained are in table above,

Discussion of Findings

The hypothesis stated that there is no significant effect of follow-up rehabilitation counselling on substance addicted persons. The result show that there significant effect was found on client undergo follow-up recovery therapy, that significant effect was found in the client recovery process in the experimental group. The null hypothesis was rejected. However, this was in line with Beddoe, 2017 and ,Siringi,2003 who opined that follow- up care is a continue support after a successful rehabilitation session caters for the clients and can help prevent relapse there by helping addicted persons stay focused on their recovery. They also maintain that modern best practices in the drug rehabilitation treatment field which include after care services, aimed at following up with addicts even after they graduate from a recovery program should not be neglected. Check-in calls, alumni event to continue their recovery even after relocating back home are some of the rehabilitation programs that offer sober companionship or' shadowing 'services, allowing recovering drug addicts to receive one- on- one support and guidance as they reenter their lives in newfound sobriety.

Conclusion

Nigeria has been affected by the problem and has become a main agendum of discussion. Drug addiction is not a problem of the addicts only it also affects their family, community and society as a whole. Moreover, drug addicts are involved in various anti social activities and their deviant behaviour causes many problems in our urban life and appears as obstacles to our socio-economic and cultural growth and development. Hence it is our duty and social responsibility to help the drug addicts and bring them back from their life-killing habit and deviant behavior to normal life through rehabilitation and ensuring proper monitoring of the recovery client to prevent relapse. The society concerted efforts and integrated measures be taken by the concerned authorities. NGOs, Members of the civil societies especially counselors, social workers can play an important role in this regard by using integrated social work methods in helping the recovery addict.

From the result obtained in this study on the effects of rehabilitation counseling on substance addicted persons in Nasarawa State, it was found out that client who passes through rehabilitation counselling with strict follow-up during recovery, have better chance of gaining full recovery.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestionss were made: there is the need for structural after care programmes that can help maintain sobriety of the client after discharge.

The study suggests that the government should establish fully sponsored rehabilitation centre, and renovate the existing structures to accommodate the growing number of drug and substance addicts who needs to be rehabilitated, Policy makers need to establish ways of promoting support group to enhance after care services once the clients are discharged from the rehabilitation centers, counsellors NGOs, communities have their roles on checking recovery individual and to stop stigmatizing those that went through the rehabilitation, Thus, help in building the client new behaviour that will show case good personality and prevent relapse.

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EFFECTIVENESS OF ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE MEDIATION TECHNIQUES ON PEER RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AMONG IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of alternative dispute mediation techniques on peer relationship quality among in-school adolescents in Rivers State. A quasi-treatment research design was adopted to examine two objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. The study population consisted of 4,215 students from 18 public schools in the study area. A sample of 220 SSS II students was selected through an intact class approach, comprising 85 students in the treatment group and 135 students in the comparison group. Peer Conflict-Mediation and Peer Relationship Quality Scale (PCPRQS) were developed and utilized for data collection. The instruments' reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha method which yielded a reliability index of 0.841, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Baseline data were collected prior to intervention. Students in the treatment group participated in a structured peer mediation programme, which included training in active listening, non-violent communication, and collaborative problem-solving techniques over a six-week period. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was applied to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicated, among other results, that students who underwent alternative dispute mediation training demonstrated a noteworthy enhancement in the quality of peer relationships compared to the comparison group. The study concluded that alternative dispute mediation techniques have a positive effect on promoting peaceful peer interactions and improving the overall relational climate among students. The study recommended that school administrators and teachers should adopt peer mediation frameworks within school conflict management policies.

Keywords: Alternative dispute mediation, conflict resolution, peer mediation, peer relationship, restorative dialogue

Introduction

Peer relationship quality refers to the depth, positivity, and stability of interpersonal connections between individuals of the same age group, particularly among adolescents in school settings. High-quality peer relationships are characterized by mutual trust, empathy, respect, cooperation, and conflict resolution (Wentzel et al., 2022). These relationships contribute significantly to students' emotional wellbeing, academic engagement, and social competence (Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2022). However, many schools in Nigeria, especially in communities like Ahoada West in Rivers State, continue to grapple with poor peer dynamics, often worsened by unresolved conflicts, bullying, and communication breakdown among students (Adewuyi & Olatunji, 2023). As such, intentional strategies for improving peer relationship quality are increasingly necessary.

Among these strategies are alternative dispute mediation techniques, which offer restorative and non-punitive approaches to handling peer conflict. One such technique is peer conflict-mediation, where students are trained to serve as mediators in resolving disputes among their peers through dialogue, empathy, and negotiation. Studies have shown that peer conflict-mediation fosters social-emotional learning and reduces the likelihood of repeated conflicts (Hilton, Sheridan & Chafouleas, 2021). Another approach is restorative dialogue, which focuses on repairing harm and restoring relationships through structured conversations that involve both the offender and the affected parties (Thorsborne & Blood, 2022). Restorative dialogue promotes accountability, emotional expression, and inclusive solutions, creating a culture of empathy and shared responsibility (Wong, Cheng, Ngan & Ma, 2021).

Given the potential of these techniques to improve school relationships, this study explores their effectiveness in enhancing peer relationship quality among students in Rivers State. It is on this basis the researchers investigated the effectiveness of alternative dispute mediation techniques on peer relationship quality in AWALGA, Rivers State.

Conceptual Clarification

Alternative Dispute Mediation (ADM)

ADM is a voluntary, structured, non-adversarial conflict resolution process where an impartial third party assists the disputing individuals in communicating effectively to reach a mutually acceptable resolution. Unlike litigation or traditional punitive approaches, ADM emphasizes collaboration, empathy, mutual respect, and problem-solving, making it especially suitable for educational settings such as schools (Thorsborne & Blood, 2022). The process encourages participants to articulate their needs, acknowledge the impact of their actions, and work together to restore relationships and promote accountability (Wong et al., 2021).

In culturally diverse educational contexts like Nigeria, where peer disputes may stem from socio-economic, ethnic, or religious differences, ADM offers an inclusive and transformative approach to school discipline. It shifts the focus from punishment to restoration and growth,

making it an essential component of modern student support systems (Adewuyi & Olatunji, 2023). Thus, in this study, Alternative Dispute Mediation is conceptualized as a strategic, student-centred intervention that promotes peaceful peer interactions and enhances relationship quality among students.

Peer Conflict-Mediation

Peer Conflict-Mediation is a structured, school-based conflict resolution process in which trained students (peer mediators) assist their fellow students in resolving interpersonal disputes through dialogue, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving. It is rooted in the principle that students, when given appropriate skills and support, can play a meaningful role in managing and resolving conflicts among themselves without resorting to adult-imposed disciplinary actions (Hilton et al., 2021). The mediation process typically involves voluntary participation by both disputants, guided by peer mediators who help them express their perspectives, identify the root causes of the disagreement, and work toward a mutually agreeable solution (Jones et al., 2022).

In multicultural and diverse settings like Nigerian secondary schools, where peer-conflict is often fuelled by differences in language, social class, or ethnic background, peer conflict-mediation offers a culturally sensitive and inclusive method of engagement. By focusing on student-led dialogue and problem-solving, it creates a safe space where learners can develop the life skills needed for peaceful coexistence and long-term relationship building (Adewuyi & Olatunji, 2023; Okolie & Odetunde, 2022). As such, peer conflict-mediation is an effective alternative dispute resolution technique that not only resolves disputes but also strengthens peer bonds and improves the overall relational climate within schools.

Restorative Dialogue

Restorative Dialogue is a form of alternative dispute mediation that focuses on repairing harm caused by conflict, restoring relationships, and rebuilding trust among individuals in a school or community setting. It involves facilitated, structured conversations between the parties involved in a conflict; including the person(s) who brought harm, those exaggerated by it, and, in some cases, observers or stakeholders; with the goal of fostering mutual understanding, accountability, and reconciliation (Thorsborne & Blood, 2022). Unlike punitive approaches that emphasize punishment and blame, restorative dialogue centres on empathy, reflection, and collective responsibility.

Restorative dialogue typically occurs through formats such as restorative circles, community conferences, or restorative justice meetings, where participants are guided to discuss what happened, how it affected them, and what can be done to make things right (Morrison, 2020). These dialogues create safe spaces where students are encouraged to express emotions, listen to others, and jointly agree on steps to repair relationships and prevent future harm. Research has shown that restorative practices in schools contribute to reduced disciplinary referrals, improved school climate, enhanced peer relationships, and stronger social-emotional skills (Wong et al., 2021; Gregory et al., 2018).

In the context of Nigerian secondary schools; where tensions may arise from socio-cultural diversity, overcrowding, or peer aggression; restorative dialogue offers a culturally adaptable, non-violent, and inclusive conflict resolution approach. By promoting empathy, accountability, and collaborative problem-solving, restorative dialogue not only addresses interpersonal disputes but also contributes to a more peaceful and relationally healthy school environment (Adewuyi & Olatunji, 2023). As such, it is a vital alternative dispute mediation technique for improving peer relationship quality in contemporary educational settings.

Peer Relationship Quality

Peer Relationship Quality refers to the overall health, strength, and positivity of social interactions and bonds between individuals of similar age, particularly in adolescence. High-quality peer relationships are typically marked by trust, empathy, shared activities, emotional support, fairness, and effective conflict resolution (Wentzel et al., 2022). These relationships are central to adolescent development and influence academic motivation, emotional regulation, identity formation, and social adjustment (Jones et al., 2022). In contrast, poor peer relationship quality; characterized by hostility, exclusion, bullying, or frequent conflict; can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and disengagement from school (Espelage et al., 2020). In the context of schools, fostering positive peer relationships contribute to a more inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environment. Effective peer relationship quality is both an outcome and a driver of broader school climate, which includes how students relate to one another, to teachers, and to the school's norms and values (Hilton et al., 2021). Tools such as peer mediation (PEM), social-emotional learning (SEL), and conflict resolution training are widely recognized as effective in improving peer interactions and strengthening relational bonds among students (Ferrer-Wreder, Kroger & Wangqvist., 2021).

Empirical Review

Sherman and Momani (2024) examined the use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) within civil and commercial frameworks, highlighting it as a modern legal approach designed to achieve fair and balanced outcomes. Their research involved an extensive analysis of up-to-date scholarly sources, with particular emphasis on mediation as a viable substitute for traditional dispute resolution. The study employed qualitative methodologies to assess the practical effectiveness of mediation principles in managing and resolving civil and commercial disagreements. It also included comparative assessments across multiple legal systems to derive valuable perspectives. Findings revealed that mediation is highly effective, particularly in promoting quicker and more cost-efficient resolutions, while also fostering mutually agreeable outcomes.

The function of mediation in the legal system as a successful and efficient settlement technique was examined by Jayadi et al. (2024). Normative legal research is the research

methodology employed, which centers on analyzing legal theories and norms contained in legal texts such as laws, court decisions, legal literature, and other related documents. The findings indicated that mediation plays a constructive role in conflict resolution by fostering open communication, uncovering underlying issues, and advancing fairness. Key elements influencing its success include the competence of the mediator, the durability of the mediation process, and the meaningful involvement of all parties. The study also incorporates viewpoints from participants, highlighting their general contentment with the results achieved through mediation.

Pablo (2024) assessed the efficiency of mediation and arbitration as methods of alternative dispute resolution. The study employed a desk research approach, collecting data from existing sources a cost-effective method compared to field research. The research drew on available published materials, including journal articles and library resources. The results showed that mediation and arbitration are cost-effective, efficient alternatives to litigation. Mediation uses a neutral facilitator for guided negotiation and tailored solutions, while arbitration involves a neutral arbitrator issuing a binding decision. Both methods ensure confidentiality, expert handling, and legal enforceability, highlighting their significance in resolving conflicts outside the courtroom.

Theoretical Background

Theory of Social Interdependence by Johnson and Johnson (1989)

The study is grounded in the Theory of Social Interdependence, originally proposed by Morton Deutsch (1949) and later expanded by Johnson and Johnson (1989). This theory suggests that the structure of social goals shapes how individuals interact and affect each other. It states that positive interdependence occurs when individuals realize their goals are linked to others' success, encouraging cooperation, effective conflict resolution, trust, and mutual support. On the other hand, negative interdependence promotes competition and adversarial relationships, while no interdependence leads to individualism and disengagement.

The theory has been widely applied in educational and conflict resolution research. In PEM programs, students are often trained to develop skills that promote positive interdependence; such as active listening, joint problem-solving, and empathy. These skills align with the theory's assertion that cooperative goal structures enhance interpersonal relations and reduce hostility (Shon & Smith, 2019).

For instance, Wentzel et al. (2022) applied the theory to investigate how peer collaboration and cooperative learning affect academic motivation and social relationships in adolescents. Similarly, McGrath and Noble (2023) used the theory to underpin their study on conflict resolution programs in schools and found that fostering cooperative group goals among students improved emotional regulation and peer support. In Nigeria, Adewuyi and Olatunji (2023) adopted a social interdependence framework to explore peer interaction patterns among secondary school students and found that collaborative interventions considerably enhanced trust and reduced conflict in classroom settings.

The Theory of Social Interdependence is particularly relevant to this study because alternative dispute mediation techniques; especially PEM; are grounded in the principle of cooperation over competition. PEM creates structured opportunities for students to experience positive interdependence as they work together to resolve disputes. By fostering shared responsibility and mutual understanding, these techniques naturally align with the theoretical assumptions of cooperative goal structures. Therefore, this study applies the principles of Social Interdependence Theory to examine how alternative dispute mediation techniques, particularly peer conflict-mediation and restorative dialogue, influence peer relationship quality among in-school adolescents.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of conflict resolution in a conflict ridden environment cannot be overemphasized. Despite the critical role that healthy peer relationships play in adolescent development, many Nigerian secondary schools experience frequent student-to-student conflicts, which often escalate into bullying, hostility, and exclusion. These interpersonal issues may be typically addressed through punitive disciplinary actions such as suspension, corporal punishment, or detention; measures that fail to resolve the underlying causes of conflict and often aggravate resentment among students. Moreover, in communities such as Ahoada West, where ethnic, socio-economic and communal tensions may further complicate school dynamics, there is a heightened need for alternative conflict resolution approaches that are student-centered and restorative in nature. The absence of structured conflict mediation frameworks in schools may results in persistent tensions, fractured relationships, and declining levels of emotional safety within the learning environment.

These challenges directly impair peer relationship quality, undermining students' capacity to build trust, cooperate, and thrive socially and academically. Low peer relationship quality not only affects individual wellbeing but also erodes the general climate of the school, reducing engagement, increasing absenteeism, and heightening behavioural issues (Espelage, Low, & Polanin, 2020). Without deliberate interventions that equip students with relational and conflict resolution skills, the school system may continue to produce learners who struggle to navigate interpersonal differences. Therefore, it is essential to assess the effectiveness of alternative dispute mediation techniques; particularly peer conflict-mediation and restorative dialogue; as viable tools for improving peer relationships.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the effectiveness of alternative dispute mediation techniques on peer relationship quality among Senior Secondary School students in AWALGA, Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the effect of peer conflict-mediation on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups.

2. Examine the effect of restorative dialogue on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of peer conflict-mediation on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups?
2. What is the effect of restorative dialogue on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups?

Hypotheses

1. There is no noteworthy effect of peer conflict-mediation on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups.
2. There is no noteworthy effect of restorative dialogue on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups.

Methodology

This study utilized a quasi-experimental design featuring a non-equivalent, non-randomized comparison group. The features of this design included a baseline, post-test and the use of an intact class. By implication, the choice of this design was to enable a comparison between the treatment and comparison group in terms of their peer relationship quality after participating in the alternative dispute mediation exercise.

The study's population consisted of 4,215 students, drawn from 18 Public Senior Secondary Schools in AWALGA, Rivers State, Nigeria (Source: Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools Board, 2023, Port Harcourt Zonal Office). This study used two intact classes with a sample of 220 SS II students, comprising 85 students in the treatment group and 135 students in the comparison group. The school and the classes used were purposive because the school is known for high rate of bullying, fighting and display of aggressive behaviour.

Peer Conflict-Mediation and Peer Relationship Quality Scale (PCPRQS) was used to collect the required data. The instrument was designed using a four-point scale rated: Strongly Agree (4 points), to Strongly Disagree (1 point). The questionnaire was reviewed for accuracy and relevance by experts in conflict resolution, Measurement and Evaluation and Psychologist. The reliability coefficients of PCPRQS = 0.841, was determined using the Cronbach Alpha; suggesting that the questionnaires had acceptable internal consistency. The study's results were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to address the research questions, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level.

Treatment Procedures

The treatment procedure involves 3 phases. Before the commencement of the study the researchers sought for the permission of the principal to conduct research in the selected school.

Following this, a two-day training session was held to educate and prepare research assistants (the school teachers) on the procedures and protocols of the study. The teachers were assigned to monitor the comparison group this decision was made to prevent any potential Hawthorne effect from influencing the students' behaviour during the study. A suitable place was also assigned for the treatment.

Phase1: At the first stage the outcome measure PCPRQS was administered to both the comparison and treatment group for baseline data, this was done one week before the commencement of the experiment.

Phase 2: the researchers carried out group counselling with students in the treatment group using a structured PEM programme. Participants in the experimental group underwent a six-week training program that focused on developing skills in active listening, non-violent communication, and collaborative problem-solving. In contrast, members of the comparison group were not exposed to any form of intervention during this period.

Phase 3: After a period of six weeks for the experiment the researchers waited for a period of two weeks to elapse before re-administering the outcome measure PCPRQS to students in both comparison and treatment groups in order to ascertain the effectiveness of alternative dispute mediation techniques (peer conflict-mediation and peer relationship quality).

Treatment stages for the treatment group

Treatment period was for 6 weeks and I session was held per week and each session ran for one hour.

Treatment stages were divided into three.

Stage 1: This stage lasted for one week, during which the researchers established rapport with the students. Activities included self-introduction by both the students and the researchers, setting ground rules for participation, and agreeing on the time and venue for subsequent meetings.

Stage 2: Consolidation Stage, real counselling took place at this stage were students were exposed to techniques of peer conflict mediation and peer relationship quality. And this lasted for 4 weeks.

Stage 3: This stage lasted for one week, during which all counselling activities were brought to a close. The students were thanked and appreciated for their participation and commitment throughout the programme. They were encouraged to continue upholding the principles of conflict mediation and to serve as ambassadors of peace within the school environment and in their interactions with others.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the effect of peer conflict-mediation on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups?

Table 1: *Mean and Std. Dev of baseline and post-test scores of the comparison and treatment group on peer conflict mediation*

Group		Pretest		Posttest		
	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Gain
Treatment	85	22.05	5.75	32.4	2.59	10.35
Control	135	18.04	2.98	22.4	3.99	4.36

The result presented in Table 1 showed that the treatment group, which received training and exposure to peer conflict-mediation techniques, had a baseline mean score of 22.05 (SD = 5.75) and a post-test mean score of 32.4 (SD = 2.59), resulting in a mean gain of 10.35. In contrast, the comparison group, which received no such intervention, recorded a baseline mean score of 18.04 (SD = 2.98) and a post-test mean score of 22.4 (SD = 3.99), yielding a mean gain of only 4.36.

The marked increase in the treatment group's mean score suggests that students who participated in the mediation intervention developed stronger relational skills, such as empathy, trust, and effective communication; key components of high-quality peer relationships. The relatively lower improvement in the comparison group implies that, without the intervention, students made only minimal progress in their peer interactions, possibly due to continued reliance on unstructured or punitive methods of conflict resolution.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of restorative dialogue on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups?

Table 2: *Mean and Std. Dev of baseline and post-test scores of Restorative Dialogue on Students' Peer Relationship Quality in the Treatment Group and Comparison Group*

Group		**Pre-test**		**Post-test**		
	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	**Mean Gain**
Treatment	85	23.32	5.70	39.11	3.97	15.79
Control	135	19.41	3.51	23.57	3.45	4.16

The result in Table 2 revealed that for the treatment group, which participated in the restorative dialogue intervention, the baseline mean score was 23.32 (SD = 5.70), while the post-test mean score increased significantly to 39.11 (SD = 3.97), resulting in a mean gain of 15.79. In contrast, the comparison group, which did not receive any restorative dialogue intervention, had a baseline mean of 19.41 (SD = 3.51) and a post-test mean of 23.57 (SD = 3.45), yielding a mean gain of only 4.16.

The increase in the treatment group's scores suggests that students who engaged in structured

restorative dialogue experienced noteworthy improvements in conflict resolution abilities, empathy, mutual respect, and emotional communication; all essential elements of healthy peer relationships. Meanwhile, the minimal increase observed in the comparison group reflects the limited impact of conventional school practices on enhancing peer interaction quality without the intervention.

Hypothesis 1: There is no noteworthy effect of peer conflict-mediation on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups.

Table 3: *Summary of ANCOVA on the effect of peer conflict-mediation on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups*

Dependent Variable: Peer Relationship Quality

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	5246.86[a]	1	5246.86	423.65	0.00	0.66
Intercept	156466.50	1	156466.50	12633.78	0.00	0.98
Group	**5246.86**	**1**	**5246.86**	**423.65**	**0.00**	**0.66**
Error	2699.88	218	12.39			
Total	159488.00	220				
Corrected Total	7946.75	219				

a. R Squared = .660 (Adjusted R Squared = .659)

Table 3 shows that there is a noteworthy effect of peer conflict-mediation on students' peer relationship quality in the treatment group and those in the comparison group ($F_1 = 423.65$, df = 218, $P < 0.05$, Partial Eta Sq. = 0.66). Hence, the null hypothesis one was rejected at the 0.05 alpha level. The finding implied that the difference in the comparison and treatment mean rating of students' peer conflict-mediation before and after exposure to intervention differs significantly.

Hypothesis 2: There is no noteworthy effect of restorative dialogue on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups.

Table 4: *Summary of ANCOVA on the noteworthy effect of restorative dialogue on students' peer relationship quality in both the treatment and comparison groups*

Dependent Variable: Restorative Dialogue

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3800.05[a]	1	3800.05	283.79	0.00	0.57
Intercept	161685.10	1	161685.10	12074.62	0.00	0.98
Group	**3800.05**	**1**	**3800.05**	**283.79**	**0.00**	**0.57**
Error	2919.13	218	13.39			
Total	165537.00	220				
Corrected Total	6719.18	219				

a. R Squared = .566 (Adjusted R Squared = .564)

Table 4 shows that there is a noteworthy effect of restorative dialogue on students' peer relationship quality in the treatment group and those in the comparison group ($F_1 = 283.79$, df = 218, $P < 0.05$, Partial Eta Sq. = 0.57). Hence, the null hypothesis two was rejected at the 0.05 alpha level and the alternate hypothesis accepted which means there is a noteworthy effect of restorative dialogue on students' peer relationship quality in the treatment group and those in the comparison group based on their baseline and post-test mean scores.. The finding implied that the difference in the comparison and treatment mean rating of students before and after exposure to restorative dialogue technique differs significantly.

Discussion of the Findings

The finding of the study is found in Tables 1 and 3 which answers research question one and tested hypothesis one showed that the effect of peer conflict-mediation on students' peer relationship quality in the treatment group and those in the comparison group was substantial. Furthermore, the result of hypothesis one revealed that there is a noteworthy effect of peer conflict-mediation on students' peer relationship quality in the treatment group and those in the comparison group. The findings align with those of Sherman and Momani (2024), who highlighted mediation's effectiveness in dispute resolution, emphasizing its advantages in saving time and costs, as well as its contribution to achieving amicable settlements. The researchers believe that this finding may be attributed to the nature of the peer conflict-mediation process itself. The training exposed students to important social and interpersonal skills such as active listening, empathy, respectful communication, and collaborative problem-solving. These skills likely helped students understand one another better, manage disagreements constructively, and build mutual trust. As adolescents spend a considerable amount of time interacting with their

peers within the school environment, equipping them with these mediation skills may have significantly improved how they respond to interpersonal conflicts and relate with one another.

The second finding is found on table 2 and table 4 which answers research question2 and tested hypothesis 2, the result of research question two showed that for the treatment group, which participated in the restorative dialogue intervention, the baseline mean score was 23.32 (SD = 5.70), while the post-test mean score increased significantly. These result are consisted with the study by Jayadi et al. (2024), which revealed that mediation contributes positively to conflict resolution by creating open dialogue spaces, identifying root problems, and promoting justice. The researchers believe that this improvement may be attributed to the nature of restorative dialogue, which provides a structured platform for students to openly express their feelings, listen to one another, and understand the consequences of their actions. Through guided discussions, students were able to reflect on their behaviour, acknowledge harm caused during conflicts, and collaboratively develop solutions that promote reconciliation. This process likely encouraged empathy, mutual respect, and emotional understanding among the students, which are essential components of healthy peer relationships.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of alternative dispute mediation techniques has a noteworthy and positive effect on peer relationship quality among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The study concluded that alternative dispute mediation techniques have a positive effect on promoting peaceful peer interactions and improving the overall relational climate among students.

The marked improvement observed in the treatment group compared to the comparison group implies that structured PEM not only enhances students' ability to manage interpersonal conflicts but also fosters a more inclusive, respectful, and cooperative school environment. This underscores the potential of school-based conflict resolution programmes to serve as proactive tools in building peaceful learning communities and improving students' social interactions and emotional well-being.

Counselling Implications

1. Based on the study and conclusion drawn, below are some implications for counselling:
   Counselling units should be established in all secondary schools in AWALGA Rivers State, Nigeria to help students resolve their conflicts amicably.
2. School Counsellors should organise seminars on conflict resolution strategies were alternative dispute mediations such as PEM, restorative dialogue and peer conflict mediation will be discussion aimed at helping students to resolve crises situation. Peace in the school will foster learning and higher academic performance and emotional wellbeing of students.

Recommendations

The study recommended as follows:

1. School administrators and counselling units in secondary schools in Rivers State should institutionalize peer conflict-mediation programmes by training selected students as peer mediators.
2. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with school heads, should integrate restorative dialogue frameworks into the existing disciplinary policies of public secondary schools.

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ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS IN MEDIATING FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD DISPUTES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Family and Neighbourhood Disputes in Nigeria often stem from cultural differences, financial strains, and communication breakdowns, threatening social harmony and community stability. Professional counsellors play a pivotal role in mediating such conflicts by integrating psychological insight, conflict resolution skills, and cultural competence. Drawing on transformative mediation, humanistic counselling, systems theory, and narrative approaches, counsellors provide safe, neutral spaces that foster empathy, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving. Their interventions address not only surface disagreements but also the underlying emotional and relational dynamics that legal remedies frequently overlook. In family settings, counsellors manage disputes involving marital breakdowns, parent-child tensions, inheritance, and blended family challenges, while in neighbourhoods, they resolve conflicts over property, noise, and cultural misunderstandings. Challenges such as power imbalances, confidentiality dilemmas, and cultural sensitivity underscore the ethical complexities of this work. Nonetheless, through community-based mediation, collaboration with traditional and religious leaders, and public awareness programmes, counsellors significantly contribute to social cohesion. The paper suggets policy integration of counselling into Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), capacity building, ethical oversight, and ongoing research to strengthen practice. Ultimately, counsellors not only resolve immediate disputes but also build resilience, healthier communication patterns, and stronger family and community bonds. Their role is essential in promoting sustainable peace, cultural respect, and long-term well-being in Nigerian society.

Keywords: Family, Counsellors, Neighbourhoods, Dispute, Nigeria

Introduction

Family and neighbourhood disputes, which often stem from cultural differences, financial

hardships, and communication failures, pose a danger to social harmony in Nigeria. Professional counsellors play a crucial role in resolving such disagreements by encouraging discussion, fostering mutual understanding, and helping parties come to acceptable settlements. By repairing relationships, preventing escalation, and fostering community cohesion through their communication, empathy, and conflict management abilities, counsellors support stability and healthy interpersonal connections in families and localities.

Human relationships often involve conflict, which can take many different forms, from small arguments to long-standing disagreements. According to Hoogenboom, Dijkstra, and Beersma (2024), the way disputes are handled influences their results rather than the conflict itself being intrinsically harmful. Unresolved conflicts are known to cause long-lasting hostility, mental health issues, social alienation, and the disintegration of community bonds, especially within families and neighbourhoods. Interpersonal disputes are made more difficult by the growing constraints that modern societies confront, such as urbanisation, cultural diversity, and economic strains.

Concerns about inheritance, caring, divorce, and intergenerational disparities are common issues in family disputes. In a similar vein, neighbourhood disputes can result from cultural misunderstandings, property boundaries, societal prejudices, and noise complaints. These disagreements are rarely merely about surface-level disagreements and are often entwined with personal values, histories, and emotions. Therefore, legal remedies typically fail to address the relational and emotional variables that drive disagreements, despite being crucial in some contexts (Sonjaya, Hanan & Sururie, 2025).

Family dispute refers to any disagreement that results from competing expectations, values, or resource competition amongst family members (couples, parents and children, siblings, in-laws, etc.). Sociological studies view these disputes as emotionally charged because they include long-term, personal relationships that often have overlapping social, cultural, and economic components. For example, characterise family conflict as involving emotional instability between couples, poor communication, blame-shifting, and verbal or physical abuse (Mokhira, 2024).

As a result, the significance of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) techniques has become increasingly apparent. According to Shoukat, Abuzar, and Shah (2025), mediation is one of the best ways to resolve conflicts outside of aggressive legal systems. In this paradigm, professional counsellors play a crucial role as mediators who integrate therapeutic skills with conflict resolution strategies. They create safe environments for open communication, promote understanding amongst people, and help individuals and groups pinpoint the root causes of disputes. Because of their training in human behaviour, empathy, and communication, they are able to deal with not just the evident issues but also the unspoken emotions that often result in conflicts.

The expansion of community-based mediation programs is another proof of the importance of easily available, non-legal remedies. In these programs, counsellors act as a bridge between the

community and official institutions, fostering resilience and social cohesion. Licensed counsellors contribute to healthier communities and better families by providing people with the skills to manage conflict in a healthy way.

This paper explores the complex role that professional counsellors play in resolving conflicts within families and communities, looking at theoretical frameworks, real-world strategies, and the wider social effects of their work. It contends that for communities looking for long-term peace and sustainable conflict resolution, incorporating professional counselling within mediation procedures is not just advantageous but crucial.

Theoretical Framework

The mediation role of professional counsellors is supported by a number of important ideas of counselling and conflict resolution, which collectively influence the methods and strategies they use. Bush and Folger (2015) developed transformative mediation, which focuses on the twin objectives of empowerment and recognition, helping each side in a dispute to feel more capable and to see things from the other's point of view. This procedure is essential for changing unfavourable interaction patterns into productive discourse.

Additionally, the principles of humanistic counselling, championed by Carl Rogers (1957), emphases the value of genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive respect. During mediation sessions, these guidelines help therapists foster openness, establish a nonjudgmental environment, and develop trust. The voluntary and cooperative nature of mediation is supported in such an environment.

Counsellors also utilise systems theory, especially in family mediation, where it is essential to comprehend the dynamics and patterns of relationships inside a family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2012). Counsellors assist clients in understanding how behaviours and communication styles contribute to persistent disputes by seeing conflicts as systemic rather than individual episodes.

Another pertinent paradigm is narrative mediation, which was created by Winslade and Monk (2017) suggests that dominant, problem-filled narratives sustain conflicts. The re-authoring of these stories is facilitated by counsellors with training in narrative techniques, allowing conflicting parties to change their viewpoints and jointly create new, more positive narratives.

Professional counsellors serve as change agents and discussion facilitators by combining these approaches. They incorporate active listening, emotional support, and communication skills training to provide safe spaces for people to express themselves and discover common ground. In this sense, the theoretical underpinnings of transformative, humanistic, systemic, and narrative methods work together to help counsellors effectively and empathetically mediate family and neighbourhood conflicts.

The Role of Counsellors in Family Disputes

Family conflicts cover a broad range of problems, including as marital dissolution, parent-child conflicts, sibling rivalry, inheritance disputes, and conflicts arising from mixed families. Unresolved family conflict can have a significant negative impact on the mental health of those involved, particularly children, who may suffer from anxiety, depression, or behavioural problems (Nichols, 2013).

In resolving such disputes, professional counsellors have a variety of roles to play. To examine interaction patterns and pinpoint maladaptive behaviours that sustain conflict, they rely on family systems therapy (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2012). They assist families in examining cultural norms, generational influences, and underlying animosities that frequently underlie superficial disputes through organised sessions.

Counsellors mediate family disputes through the following:

1. Providing a safe, neutral environment where each party feels heard without fear of judgment or retaliation.
2. Encouraging active listening, empathy, and respectful communication techniques.
3. Helping family members articulate their needs and underlying emotions, moving beyond blame and defensiveness.
4. Facilitating collaborative problem-solving and negotiation, guiding families to develop mutually agreeable solutions.

In addition to these methods, therapists frequently use psychoeducation to teach family members how to resolve conflicts, control their emotions, and communicate in a healthy way.

This lessens the possibility of recurrent crises by enabling families to resolve disputes in the future in a constructive manner.

Families that participate in mediation with counsellors are less likely to turn to expensive and combative litigation, according to research. Studies by (McGowan, 2018) demonstrate that mediated divorce settlements result in higher parental satisfaction, better co-parenting relationships, and improved outcomes for children compared to court-imposed solutions. Moreover, mediation can be adapted for culturally diverse families, where counsellors act as cultural brokers, ensuring that interventions respect unique family norms and traditions.

Additionally, counsellors are crucial in high-conflict scenarios like custody battles and abuse accusations. Counsellors work with attorneys, social workers, and child protection organisations to put the safety and best interests of vulnerable family members first, but they do not take the role of legal authorities.

Professional counsellors play a major role in turning damaging family disputes into chances

for development, healing, and better relationships through ongoing support, follow-up sessions, and referrals to specialised services when necessary.

The Role of Counsellors in Neighbourhood Disputes

Neighbourhood disputes can take many different forms, such as disputes about shared facilities, property lines, noise levels, cultural differences, or even lifestyle choices. Even while these disputes may seem insignificant, if they are not resolved, they have the potential to destroy community harmony and develop into long-lasting feuds or legal disputes (Craver, 2015). Due to intimate living quarters and a diverse population, these conflicts are even more common in densely populated urban areas.

In order to keep these conflicts from getting worse, professional counsellors who work via local conflict resolution centers or community mediation programs are essential. They do more than just negotiate; they also serve as educators, community builders, and facilitators.

Counsellors mediate neighbourhood disputes by:

i. Assessing the emotional and relational dynamics fueling the conflict, including hidden biases or cultural misunderstandings.
ii. Creating a neutral, confidential venue where parties feel safe to express grievances and fears without judgment.
iii. Encouraging open dialogue, active listening, and mutual respect, ensuring that all voices are heard, including marginalized or less assertive community members.
iv. Promoting co-created solutions that address both practical concerns and emotional needs, increasing the likelihood of sustainable agreements.
v. Teaching community members conflict resolution skills, communication strategies, and empathy, thereby strengthening the community's capacity to manage future disputes independently.

Research from community mediation programs across the globe shows that when counsellors arbitrate neighbourhood disagreements, the rates of violence, vandalism, and recurring arguments are reduced (Smith, 2020). In addition to resolving immediate disputes, these initiatives help neighbourhoods develop social capital and trust.

Additionally, counsellors modify their techniques to fit cultural situations, serving as cultural translators when miscommunications result from disparities in traditions, languages, or customs. They aid in bridging cultural gaps and averting disputes stemming from bias or prejudices by promoting understanding.Most importantly, counsellors should remain neutral and do not impose solutions but guide parties to develop agreements they genuinely accept. In cases where power imbalances exist, such as disputes involving vulnerable tenants or minority groups, counsellors take steps to ensure fairness and equity.

In the end, the involvement of qualified counsellors in community mediation improves social cohesion, encourages harmonious cohabitation, and gives communities the ability to settle disputes amicably while lessening the strain on official legal systems.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Professional counsellors mediate family and neighbourhood conflicts in a transforming way, but their work is not without major obstacles and complicated ethical issues. Addressing power disparities that may occur when one side controls the discussion because of social standing, financial influence, or cultural privilege is one of the main difficulties (Asghar, Shami & Ashraf, 2025). To guarantee that every opinion is heard equally, counsellors must be watchful in handling such imbalances.

Additionally, cultural sensitivity presents special difficulties. Because they frequently work with people from different backgrounds, mediators must be knowledgeable of cultural conventions, values, and communication styles. Biases can be reinforced and the mediation process compromised by misinterpreting or ignoring cultural differences. To successfully negotiate these intricacies, counsellors must dedicate themselves to ongoing cultural competency training and introspection.

In mediation practice, ethical principles including informed consent, objectivity, and professional boundaries cannot be compromised. Counsellors need to make sure that everyone is aware of their rights, the mediation process, and the fact that participation is entirely voluntary. Counsellors must avoid taking sides, imposing their values, or unnecessarily influencing results in order to maintain professional neutrality.

Professional therapists must also be able to recognise when a conflict is beyond the purview of mediation and has to be referred to legal authorities, protective services, or other experts. Law enforcement and social services must work together right once in cases involving criminal activity, serious domestic abuse, or risks to the protection of children in order to protect individuals who are at risk.

Professional counsellors manage the difficult balance between assisting in conflict resolution and safeguarding the rights and well-being of all parties involved by upholding ethical standards, participating in continuous supervision, and being aware of the boundaries of their job.

Case Study

A thorough case study demonstrates the usefulness of counsellors in resolving local conflicts. Long-term locals and an increasing number of recent immigrants whose cultural customs deviated from accepted neighbourhood norms clashed in one town. According to Dias, Pereira, Vieira, Barbosa, Quintão, and Lafraia (2023), misunderstandings regarding social gatherings, common places, and noise levels led to resentment that might develop into formal complaints and

community disintegration.

Through a local community mediation program, a professional counsellor intervened to promote communication. In order to provide a safe space for both groups to express their worries and cultural viewpoints, the counsellor set up organised gatherings. The counsellor assisted both parties in identifying common values and interests in community safety and peace by actively listening, rephrasing unfavourable presumptions, and clearing up misunderstandings.

The counsellor promoted trust and dispelled preconceptions by incorporating culturally sensitive methods including employing translators and recognising customs. After the mediation sessions, a set of community rules that addressed things like celebration events, shared space etiquette, and quiet hours were mutually agreed upon.

In addition to settling the immediate conflict, the counselor's efforts sparked the formation of a neighbourhood council with members from various ethnic backgrounds. In order to arrange inclusive community events, build relationships, and proactively handle new disputes, this council now convenes on a regular basis. The story demonstrates how counsellors can turn disagreements into chances for long-term community building and intercultural understanding by combining mediation techniques with cultural knowledge.

Conclusion

Professional counsellors bring an invaluable blend of psychological insight, conflict resolution expertise, and cultural sensitivity to the mediation of family and neighbourhood disputes. Their ability to address the emotional and relational dimensions of conflict sets them apart from purely legal or administrative interventions. Through the idea of creating safe spaces for dialogue, encouraging mutual understanding, and facilitating collaborative problem-solving, counsellors help communities resolve tensions before they escalate into costly legal battles or long-standing animosity. Integrating professional counsellors into community mediation frameworks and local dispute resolution initiatives can significantly enhance social cohesion, promote respect for cultural diversity, and build conflict resilience within families and neighbourhoods. Their role contributes not only to immediate dispute resolution but also to the development of healthier communication patterns and stronger, more connected communities. In an increasingly diverse and complex world, investing in the training and deployment of counsellors as mediators is a vital step towards sustainable peace and community well-being.

Suggestions on the Challenges of Mediating Family Dispute in Nigeria

The following suggestions were made to guide properly in handling the challenges of challenges of mediating family dispute in Nigeria.

1. **Institutionalize Community Mediation Centres:** Community-based mediation centers should be established by the Nigerian government in partnership with professional

counselling bodies. These facilities would lessen an excessive dependence on the legal system by offering easily available, non-legal channels for resolving conflicts.

2. **Integrate Counsellors into Local Governance Structures:** Professional counsellors should be officially recognised by local government officials as mediators in family and neighbourhood conflicts. This integration will guarantee that conflicts are handled comprehensively, taking relational, cultural, and emotional factors into account.
3. **Enhance Counsellor Training on Cultural Competence:** Counsellors should be continuously trained in changing social dynamics, indigenous conflict resolution techniques, and cultural sensitivity. This would enable them to resolve conflicts arising from cultural misinterpretations and diversity in an efficient manner.
4. **Promote Public Awareness of ADR and Counselling Services:** Families and communities should be made aware of the advantages of counselling and mediation as alternatives to litigation through awareness campaigns. This will lessen the escalation of confrontations by promoting early intervention.
5. **Strengthen Ethical and Legal Safeguards:** Counsellors should be guided in managing confidentiality, power disparities, and high-risk situations (such as abuse or violence) by clear ethical norms and supported legal frameworks. Additionally, cooperation with security agencies, legal institutions, and social workers should be strengthened.
6. **Policy Integration of Counselling into ADR Mechanisms:** Professional counsellors should be formally incorporated into state and municipal Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) systems by the Nigerian government. They should collaborate with mediators, attorneys, and traditional leaders to resolve family and neighbourhood conflicts.
7. **Building Capacity and Professional Development:** To improve counsellors' efficacy in a variety of settings, counselling associations should regularly host conferences, seminars, and certification programs that concentrate on conflict resolution, trauma-informed care, and culturally sensitive mediation.
8. **Community-Based Preventive Programmes:** To reduce the possibility that disagreements may turn into fights, counsellors should create proactive family and community education programs on stress management, emotional control, and communication techniques.
9. **Collaborative Networks with Traditional and Religious Leaders:** Counsellors should work with religious leaders and elders to co-mediate conflicts because of their cultural significance in Nigerian society. Counselling therapies get more credibility and community acceptance as a result of this collaboration.
10. **Strengthening Ethical Oversight:** Professional bodies such as the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should establish more stringent supervision mechanisms to ensure that counsellors adhere to moral norms, particularly with regard to handling power imbalances, confidentiality, and impartiality.

11. Research and Continuous Evaluation: Empirical studies on the effectiveness of counselor-led mediation in Nigeria should be funded by universities and counselling societies. Ongoing assessment will produce evidence-based tactics, enhance procedures, and direct future legislation.

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INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OF MARRIED ADULTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS ACROSS DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

*The study explored the influence of emotional intelligence on domestic violence among married adults in Tertiary Institutions Across Delta State, Nigeria. Specifically, it examined how key dimensions of emotional intelligence, self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills contributes to the occurrence or reduction of domestic violence among married persons across the state. A correlational survey design was adopted for the research. The target population comprised all married staff members in three tertiary institutions: the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun; Southern Delta University, Ozoro; and Admiralty University, Ibusa. Altogether, the population consisted of 3,186 married persons (1,973 males and 1,213 females). From this population, a sample of 540 participants was selected through a multi-stage random sampling technique. Data were gathered using a researcher-designed instrument titled *Emotional Intelligence and Domestic Violence Scale (EDVS)*. The instrument's validity was confirmed through expert review in Measurement and Evaluation, followed by factor analysis for item extraction. Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha produced coefficients of $\alpha = 0.79$ for the Emotional Intelligence subscale and $\alpha = 0.80$ for the Domestic Violence, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Descriptive statistics and coefficients of determination addressed the research question, while multiple regression analysis tested the null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. Results indicated a significant association between the variables. Conversely, self-awareness and self-regulation showed no significant predictive relationship with domestic violence among married persons. From these findings, the study recommends that interventions aimed at curbing domestic violence should prioritize the enhancement of self-motivation, empathy, and social interaction skills among the married.*

Introduction

Marriage has long been a central focus of human existence, recognized as one of the oldest institutions established by humanity. It is regarded as the foundation of every family, implying that any union outside the marital relationship cannot be considered marriage. The stability of society is often believed to rest on the stability of marriages; when marital relationships are troubled, they can give rise to dysfunctional families, which in turn may contribute to a destabilized society.

Unfortunately, reports from researchers and the media have consistently highlighted the prevalence of domestic violence within marriages. Entering into marriage is not synonymous with anticipating divorce, as no couple begins their union with such an expectation (John-Ekaba, 2021). Regardless of socio-economic background, individuals generally seek not just marriage, but a lasting union with someone they love, trust, and hope to share their lives with indefinitely. Yet, the persistence of domestic violence reveals the difficulty many couples face in sustaining the initial bond and optimism that once defined their relationship.

Literature Review

Marriage has been "defined in various ways by different scholars, depending on their perspectives and cultural backgrounds" John-Ekaba (2021) describes marriage as the union of two mature adults—physically, emotionally, and psychologically—typically a man and a woman from diverse backgrounds (such as family, educational, socio-economic, cultural, and religious), who agree to live together in a legally recognized relationship. This union is established within cultural and religious frameworks, with the purpose of forming a family in accordance with both divine and state expectations.

Similarly, Dabone et al. (2018) define marriage as a union between a biologically unrelated man and woman who consent to live together and derive mutual benefits from the relationship. Such benefits may include sexual fulfillment, love, companionship, and the opportunity to procreate legitimately. Haviland (2021) further emphasizes that marriage is both a social institution and a legal contract that creates rights and responsibilities not only between the spouses themselves but also between the spouses and their children, as well as their extended families.

As an institution, marriage transcends cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries specifically focuses on heterosexual marriages (unions between men and women), and therefore excludes same-sex and non-human marital relationships.

Operational Definition of Terms

i. **Emotional Intelligence:** Emotional intelligence can be described as the capacity to accurately recognize, interpret, and apply emotions in ways that support effective thinking and decision-making. It also involves the intentional regulation of emotional responses to

promote both personal development and healthy social interactions.

ii. **Self-Awareness:** Self-awareness refers to an individual's ability to consciously recognize their own emotional states and to understand how these emotions influence patterns of thought and behaviour. It provides the foundation for emotional growth and effective interpersonal engagement.

iii. **Self-Regulation:** Self-regulation is the skill of managing and modulating emotional impulses, ensuring that potentially harmful or disruptive feelings are transformed into constructive responses. It emphasizes emotional balance and the ability to express oneself appropriately in varying contexts.

iv. **Self-Motivation:** Self-motivation involves harnessing emotions to sustain determination and goal-directed behaviour. It requires resilience in the face of setbacks and the capacity to overcome tendencies such as procrastination, doubt, or distraction in pursuit of long-term objectives.

v. **Empathy:** Empathy is the ability to perceive and interpret the emotions of others, drawing on both verbal expressions and non-verbal signals. It entails a genuine effort to understand another person's perspective and respond with sensitivity and compassion.

vi. **Social Skills:** Social skills represent the competence to engage constructively with others through effective communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. They facilitate meaningful relationships built on respect, trust, and mutual understanding.

vii. **Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence refers to a sustained pattern of abusive behaviours in intimate relationships, where one partner exerts power and control over the other. It often encompasses emotional, psychological, physical, or economic tactics designed to dominate and oppress the victim.

Domestic Violence in Marital Context

Ideally, marriage is regarded as a lifelong partnership where a man and a woman come together to share companionship, intimacy, affection, and the socially recognized privilege of procreation. It is meant to foster mutual growth, security, and emotional fulfillment. Unfortunately, this vision is increasingly threatened by the growing prevalence of domestic violence in marital relationships. Domestic violence has been conceptualized in diverse ways, with terms such as spousal abuse, marital assault, wife battering, intimate partner violence, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail and family violence commonly used to describe it. It may manifest in physical attacks, psychological manipulation, sexual coercion, stalking, or controlling behaviours. More comprehensively, it refers to any conduct within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to a partner (Oloniniyi et al., 2022). Such behaviour often seeks to dominate or control through intimidation, humiliation, coercion, isolation, or injury (Nwoke et al. 2020). Importantly, domestic violence can occur in multiple forms—emotional, physical, sexual, financial, psychological, and even digital.

Globally, domestic violence transcends social class, culture, religion, and economic background, making it a universal challenge with devastating public health implications. It affects reproductive health, mental wellness, and physical safety, with women disproportionately affected. Beyond its impact on victims, it destabilizes marriages by eroding trust, intimacy, and family cohesion, thereby threatening the very foundation of the household unit except intelligently handled.

Emotional Intelligence and Domestic Violence

Researchers have identified several triggers of domestic violence, ranging from cultural traditions and socioeconomic stressors to personality traits and environmental pressures (Nwoke et al. 2020; Sunitha, 2016). In recent years, emotional intelligence has gained increasing recognition as a vital factor influencing marital stability, conflict resolution, and overall relationship health. Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and express emotions constructively. According to Mohzan et al. (2018), it involves perceiving emotions accurately, using them to guide thought, and regulating them in ways that promote personal development and healthy social interaction. This highlights the mutual influence between cognition and emotion—reasoning can regulate emotional impulses, while emotions can enhance decision-making.

Because marriage is sustained largely through emotional connection, deficiencies in emotional intelligence often leave couples ill-equipped to manage conflict or communicate effectively. Individuals who lack emotional awareness or regulation are more likely to respond to stress with aggression, withdrawal, or other destructive behaviours. Conversely, emotionally intelligent partners demonstrate self-control, empathy, and problem-solving skills that reduce the likelihood of violence. Thus, exploring the link between emotional intelligence and domestic violence offers insight into how marital conflicts can be prevented or mitigated. Mishra et al. (2017) identify three broad dimensions of emotional intelligence: Emotional competence, emotional maturity, and emotional sensitivity. Emotional competence reflects the ability to respond constructively to emotional stimuli and is often marked by optimism and resilience (Onyekuru, et al. 2017). Emotional maturity entails striking a balance between rational thought and emotional expression, promoting stability in both self-management and interpersonal relationships. Emotional sensitivity, on the other hand, involves perceiving and interpreting emotional signals accurately and adapting appropriately to social contexts. These dimensions emphasize the role of emotional balance and adaptability in sustaining healthy marital interactions.

Similarly, Goleman's (1995) widely recognized framework outlines five interrelated domains of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These components collectively provide a foundation for understanding how emotional intelligence shapes marital relationships, influencing whether conflicts are resolved peacefully or escalate into abuse.

Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence

Self-Awareness: Recognizing one's emotions, understanding their triggers, and identifying how they influence thoughts and behaviours.

Self-Regulation: Managing emotional impulses and transforming negative reactions into constructive responses that are appropriate to the situation.

Self-Motivation: Directing emotions toward purposeful action, maintaining persistence despite obstacles, and avoiding destructive impulses such as aggression or withdrawal.

Empathy: Perceiving and understanding the feelings of others through both verbal and non-verbal cues, thereby fostering compassion and support.

Social Skills (Relationship Management): Navigating interpersonal relationships effectively through communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, and cooperation. Collectively, these components can be grouped into two overarching categories: intrapersonal competencies (self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation) and interpersonal competencies (empathy and social skills). Together, they determine the quality of communication, intimacy, trust, and adjustment in marriage. These factors serve as critical markers of marital satisfaction and stability, reducing the risk of destructive patterns such as domestic violence.

Global Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence remains one of the most widespread social and public health challenges across the globe. Empirical evidence underscores its alarming prevalence. Smith et al. (2017) observed that approximately 37.3% of women worldwide have experienced some form of physical assault, sexual coercion, or stalking, while nearly half (47.1%) reported being subjected to psychological aggression at some point in their lives. In a similar vein, estimates by UNFPA (2013) and Abayomi (2014) suggest that between 10% and 69% of women globally suffer abuse from intimate partners, with intimate partner violence contributing to an estimated 1,000–1,600 female deaths annually. International statistics further demonstrate the multidimensional nature of domestic abuse. It is estimated that one in every three women has endured physical assault, while between 15% and 59% have been victims of combined physical and sexual violence. Psychological or emotional abuse affects between 7% and 68% of women globally, whereas around 7% experience economic violence in their relationships. The World Health Organization (2014) also reported that about 35% of women worldwide have faced either intimate partner violence or non-partner-related sexual violence, highlighting the extensive reach of the problem.

Although global discourse tends to emphasize violence against women, evidence indicates that men can also be victims. A report in the Vanguard Newspaper (August 25, 2016) documented cases in Nigeria where men suffered verbal, physical, or sexual abuse from their wives, including acid attacks. Such incidents, however, are often underreported due to stigma and cultural expectations of male endurance. Nationwide surveys show that 78% of Nigerians perceive domestic violence as increasing, a view consistent across gender, age, and region.

In Nigeria, domestic violence has continued to rise steadily over the past decades, posing a serious challenge to family stability and public health. Fasasi (2020) noted that the prevalence of intimate partner violence among women aged 15–49 years increased from 25% in 2008 to 31% in 2013, and further to 36% in 2018. Disturbingly, despite the growing awareness of gender rights, more than one in four women still perceive wife beating as justifiable under certain conditions, reflecting deeply entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate violence.

Regional investigations reveal significant disparities in prevalence across the country. For instance, Tanimu et al. (2018) reported rates as high as 42% in the North, compared to 29% in the South-West (Okenwa et al., 2009), 78.8% in the South-East (Okemgbo et al., 2018), and 41% in the South-South (Dienye et al., 2014). Udoyen et al. (2017) further highlighted variations ranging from as low as 3% in the North-West and South-West to 12–13% in the South-East and South-South. Earlier studies indicated particularly alarming figures in the Niger Delta, with state-level prevalence ranging from 56.1% in Bayelsa to 79% in Edo and Imo (Antai&Antai, cited in Udoyen et al., 2017). Collectively, these findings underscore that domestic violence is disproportionately high in the Niger Delta region, where economic, cultural, and social stressors may exacerbate the problem.

Emotional Intelligence and Spousal Violence

Recent scholarship has increasingly turned attention to the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in shaping marital interactions and preventing spousal violence. Akpan et al. (2021), in a study involving 409 married female teachers in Akwa Ibom State, employed a correlational survey design with Pearson Product Moment Correlation at a 0.05 level of significance. Their results showed strong associations between EI components and spousal violence: empathy ($r = 0.56$), self-regulation ($r = 0.64$), and self-identity ($r = 0.71$). These outcomes suggest that deficits in emotional intelligence significantly increase the likelihood of marital violence, highlighting the importance of emotional regulation and interpersonal competence in fostering stable relationships.

Complementary evidence comes from Masoudzadeh et al. (2022), who studied 123 men and women referred to a forensic medicine center in Iran. Using correlation and regression analyses, they found that emotional schemas in relationships explained 41% of the variance in domestic violence ($F = 44.41$, $r = 0.652$, $p < 0.001$). This finding demonstrates that maladaptive emotional patterns and deficiencies in emotional processing play a crucial role in predicting abusive behaviour.

The persistence of spousal violence in marital unions has consequences that extend far beyond the couple. It disrupts the psychological and emotional development of children, weakens family cohesion, and creates ripple effects that undermine community stability and societal well-being. As such, addressing the roots of domestic violence requires not only legal and social interventions but also a deeper exploration of the psychological and emotional factors that predispose individuals to abusive behaviour.

Statement of the Problem

"Domestic violence is a global phenomenon that transcends national boundaries, socio-economic classes, cultural backgrounds, races, and religious affiliations". It can occur irrespective of age, gender, sexual orientation, or marital status and is not confined to any specific social or educational group. It affects individuals in marriages, cohabiting unions, dating relationships, and even those who share children outside of marriage. The impact of domestic violence extends beyond the immediate victims, often influencing family members, friends, colleagues, witnesses, and the wider community. Children exposed to domestic violence are particularly vulnerable, as they frequently experience long-term emotional, psychological, and social consequences. Violence within the family has immeasurable costs for both present and future generations, undermining human development and restricting victims' personal growth, productivity, and socio-economic contributions. Victims often endure physical and psychological harm such as stress, fear, depression, anxiety, phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Pregnant victims face heightened risks, like miscarriages, or some permanent injuries and even including loss of life.

The consequences of domestic violence also extend to economic deprivation and social exclusion. Many victims are left vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and isolation. Children raised in violent households are at increased risk of developing conduct disorders, low self-esteem, substance dependence, poor academic performance, and risky sexual behaviours, the list being endless. Factors that may predispose them to become either future perpetrators or victims of abuse, the normalization of violence within the home, therefore, perpetuates an intergenerational cycle that poses significant dangers to society.

Domestic violence has reached epidemic proportions, with devastating effects that include severe injuries, long-term health complications, and even fatalities. Media reports frequently highlight cases of homicide involving not only victims but also children, relatives, bystanders, and, in some cases, perpetrators themselves. Addressing this crisis requires identifying and examining variables that may either exacerbate or mitigate its prevalence.

Purpose of the Study

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the influence of emotional intelligence on domestic violence among married persons in Delta State.

Specific Objectives

The study specifically seeks to:

1. "Assess the extent of the relationship between emotional intelligence and domestic violence among married adults in Delta State".
2. "Determine whether the individual components of emotional intelligence significantly correlate with domestic violence among married adults in Delta State".

Research Question

"What is the extent of relationship between emotional intelligence and domestic violence among marred adults in Delta State"?

Hypothesis

"There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and domestic violence among marred adults in Delta State".

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a correlational survey research design to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and domestic violence among married adults in tertiary institutions across Delta State, Nigeria individuals in Delta State. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the examination of associations between variables without manipulation.

Population of the Study

The study population comprised all married staff members across three tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria: the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun; Southern Delta University, Ozoro; and Admiralty University, Ibusa. The accessible population was estimated at 3,186 married persons, consisting of 1,973 males and 1,213 females.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

From the population, a sample of 540 married persons was drawn using a multi-stage random sampling technique. This approach ensured proportionate representation from each institution and reduced the likelihood of sampling bias.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Emotional Intelligence and Domestic Violence Scale (EDVS)." The EDVS was adapted from two established instruments: Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (1995), revised by Farmer et al. (2013), and the Domestic Violence Questionnaire developed by Abolmaali et al. (2014).The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A, Respondents' demographic information.

Section B contains Research variables, which included Emotional Intelligence (10 items) and Domestic Violence (15 items). Items were rated on a four-point Likert rating scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the instrument was confirmed by specialists in Measurement and Evaluation. Further construct validity was established through factor analysis, with extracted

Eigen values ranging between 0.67 and 0.94, confirming the adequacy of the scale. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of α = 0.79 for the Emotional Intelligence Subscale (EIS) and α = 0.80 for the Domestic Violence Subscale (DVS). The values demonstrate acceptable internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

Method of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentages) and the coefficient of determination were used to answer the research questions. To test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was employed at the 0.05 level of statistical significance.

Presentation of results

Research Question: "What is the extent of relationship between emotional intelligence and domestic violence among marred adults in tertiary institutions across Delta State"?

Table 1: *Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics of the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Domestic Violence of Married Adults*

VARIABLES	Mean	SD	SA	SR	SM	EM	SS	DV
Self-Awareness (SA)	26.07	3.21	1.00					
Self-Regulation (SR)	31.41	4.64	.017	1.00				
Self-Motivation (SM)	32.42	4.11	.030	.025	1.00			
Empathy (EM)	33.95	3.69	.104	.039	.292	1.00		
Social Skill (SS)	32.90	3.94	-.069	-.010	-.072	.042	1.00	
Domestic Violence (DV)	33.37	4.35	.038	.021	.411	.224	-.083	1.00

R=.430, R^2=.185, N=540

Table 1 presents the correlation matrix illustrating the relationships between the components of emotional intelligence and domestic violence. The correlation coefficients were reported as follows: Self-Awareness (SA = .038), Self-Regulation (SR = .021), Self-Motivation (SM = .441), Empathy (EM = .224), and Social Skill (SS = –.038). The results show that self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, and empathy were positively associated with domestic violence, whereas social skill demonstrated a negative relationship. Notably, the correlations of self-awareness and self-regulation with domestic violence were negligible.

The overall correlation between emotional intelligence and domestic violence was r = .430, yielding a coefficient of determination of R^2 = .185. This indicates a moderately strong positive relationship, with emotional intelligence explaining approximately 18.5% of the variance in domestic violence among married individuals.

The findings further highlight emotional intelligence as an important predictor of domestic violence, with self-motivation and empathy exerting stronger predictive influence compared to other components.

Hypothesis: "There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and domestic violence among marred adults in tertiary institutions across Delta State".

Table 2: *Multiple Regression of Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Domestic Violence Among Married Adults*

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1883.516	5	376.706	24.13	.000[b]
	Residual	8306.667	534	15.585		
	Total	10190.183	539			

Table 2 presents the regression statistics examining the relationship between emotional intelligence components (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills) and domestic violence among married persons. The regression ANOVA results yielded df = 6, 533; F = 24.13; p = 0.000.

At the 0.05 level of significance, the obtained p-value (0.000) was lower than the alpha threshold (0.05), indicating a statistically significant relationship. Accordingly, the null hypothesis, which posited that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and domestic violence among married persons was rejected.

These findings confirm that the components of emotional intelligence, when considered collectively, have a significant relationship with domestic violence among married adults.

Table 3: Coefficient Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Demotic Violence Among Marital Adults

		Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficients**		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	15.085	3.109		4.852	.000
	Self-Awareness	-.016	.053	.038	-.309	.757
	Self-Regulation	-.036	.052	.021	-.689	.491
	Self-Motivation	.077	.057	.073	1.342	.001
	Empathy	.415	.060	.352	6.958	.000
	Social Skills	-.092	.058	-.083	-1.578	.005

***Predictors**: (Constant), Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Self-Motivation, Empathy, Social Skills*

Dependent Variable(s): Domestic Violence

In addition, the coefficient table outlines the specific contributions of each emotional intelligence dimension to domestic violence among married individuals. The regression results revealed the following values: self-awareness (β = .024, t = –0.309, p = .757), self-regulation (β = .021, t = –0.689, p = .491), self-motivation (β = .073, t = 1.342, p = .001), empathy (β = .352, t = 6.958, p = .000), and social skills (β = –0.083, t = –1.578, p = .005).

From these outcomes, it is evident that self-motivation, empathy, and social skills made statistically significant contributions to the prediction of domestic violence, whereas self-awareness and self-regulation did not demonstrate significant effects

Discussion

The analysis of the research questions and hypotheses revealed a notable association between emotional intelligence and domestic violence among married individuals in Delta State. In particular, the components of self-motivation, empathy, and social skills showed significant relationships with domestic violence, whereas self-awareness and self-regulation were not statistically significant. This suggests that self-motivation, empathy, and social skills serve as more reliable predictors of domestic violence among married persons in tertiary institutions within Delta State, while self-awareness and self-regulation exert minimal influence.

A plausible explanation for these findings is that individuals may sometimes channel self-motivation into harmful actions, including violent behaviour, particularly when provoked by perceived threats or frustrations. Likewise, reduced empathy can intensify emotional reactivity, thereby increasing the likelihood of violent responses. In addition, poor social skills may limit one's ability to effectively manage interpersonal conflicts, leading to escalations that manifest in violence.

The findings of this study align with earlier research. For example, Akpan et al. (2021) found a significant link between emotional intelligence particularly empathy, self-regulation, self-identity and spousal violence among married female teachers in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Likewise, Masoudzadeh et al. (2022) reported that emotional intelligence patterns were strongly associated with domestic violence among individuals examined at a forensic medicine center in Iran. Collectively, these studies reinforce the idea that weaknesses in self-motivation, empathy, and social skills heighten the risk of violent behaviours, including domestic abuse, among married individuals.

Given the rising incidence and devastating consequences of domestic and intimate partner violence, identifying psychological and emotional factors that influence such behavior remains essential. The present study contributes to this understanding by establishing that emotional intelligence is significantly related to domestic violence. Notably, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills emerged as strong predictors of violent behaviour, while self-awareness and self-regulation were not significantly linked to domestic violence among married persons in Delta State.

Recommendations

* Enhancement of Emotional Intelligence: Married persons, particularly teachers, should be encouraged to strengthen their emotional intelligence, as it plays a crucial role in reducing the occurrence of domestic violence.
* Focus on Key Components: Efforts should be directed towards developing self-motivation, empathy, and social management skills, since these components significantly contribute to healthier marital relationships and serve as protective factors against violence.
* Role of Counselling Psychologists: Counselling psychologists should intensify awareness campaigns on the adverse effects of poor emotional intelligence in marital relationships. They should also design and implement evidence-based intervention programs and training workshops that equip married persons with emotional skills for constructive conflict management, thereby reducing the incidence of domestic violence.

Implications for Counselling

The results of this study emphasize the urgent need for a societal reorientation on the importance of counselling in enhancing personal, marital, and family well-being. In particular, it highlights the value of premarital counselling as a proactive measure to prepare intending couples for marital life. Additionally, young couples should be provided with ongoing counselling support to strengthen their emotional skills, manage conflicts effectively, and nurture stable family relationships.

By prioritizing counselling interventions, society can foster healthier marriages, reduce the prevalence of "domestic violence, and promote peace", harmony, and orderliness within the broader community.

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IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TRAINING IN ENHANCING EMPATHY AND PEER RELATIONSHIP AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) training on enhancing empathy and peer relationship quality among secondary school students in Delta State, Nigeria. The study determined the effect of EI counselling on students' empathy levels, examined its influence on peer relationship quality, compare empathy levels between trained and untrained students, and assessed the correlation between empathy and peer relationships. A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design was adopted. 120 students were selected from six public secondary schools across the three senatorial districts of Delta State using multistage sampling. Participants were grouped into experimental and control groups. Standardized instruments - the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test ($\alpha = 0.87$), Toronto Empathy Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.81$), and Peer Relationship Inventory ($\alpha = 0.85$) were used to collect data. The experimental group received a structured 6-week EI counselling programme, while the control group received no intervention. Paired sample t-tests showed significant improvements in empathy ($t = -7.82$, $p < 0.001$) and peer relationship scores ($t = -6.49$, $p < 0.001$) in the experimental group. An independent t-test revealed a significant post-intervention difference in empathy between the experimental and control groups ($t = 4.95$, $p < 0.001$). Pearson's correlation indicated a strong positive relationship between empathy and peer relationships ($r = 0.726$, $p < 0.001$). It was concluded that EI counselling significantly enhances students' interpersonal skills. The study recommended integrating emotional intelligence modules into school counselling programmes to foster empathy, improve peer relationships, and reduce student conflict in Nigerian secondary schools.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Empathy, Peer Relationships, Counselling

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a vital component of psychological well-being, social functioning, and academic success among adolescents. It is the process of identifying, perceiving, controlling, and employing feelings to themselves and other people (Jack & Oguntayo, 2020). The highly emotional stage of adolescence involves complicated social relationships, and to maintain good relations with peers and adjust to social tasks, emotional competence is a strong requirement among adolescent students.

In Delta State, the lack of socio-emotional competence is seen in the rising cases of bullying, peer conflicts, and antisocial behaviours among secondary school students. The relationships with peers may be considered a protective or a risk factor depending on how these adolescents deal with interpersonal problems. Emotional intelligence is hence a primary predictor of empathy and positive peer relations serving to promote school connectedness, psychological safety, and academic engagement (Udeh & Ezeokafor, 2022).

One of the main aspects of emotional intelligence that improves cooperation and prosocial behaviour is empathy, or the ability to share and understand others. Highly empathetic adolescents are less prone to being aggressive or suffer victimization by peers (Omumu, 2024). Nevertheless, a lot of students are not able to have emotions and interpersonal relations which lead to isolation and a lot of conflicts. This shows the relevance of instilled interventions that foster emotional dexterities in a school setting.

Counselling offers an instrumental way through which the emotional competencies of students can be built. School counselling provides learners with self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, and the ability to communicate with others (Igweilo et al., 2024). The counselling aspect of emotional intelligence training enables students to understand emotional signals, react suitably towards others, as well as establish better relationships.

Global studies (Castillo et al., 2013; Vila et al., 2021; Afsharzada et al., 2022; Jack and Oguntayo, 2020)supports the usefulness of training emotional intelligence in improving the emotional and social performance of adolescents. Bisji et al. (2019) and Jack and Oguntayo (2020) determined in Nigeria that EI training enhanced students in self-regulation, empathy, and conflict resolution, which leads to better engagement with peers. However, a little empirical data is available to support the relationship between EI counselling and empathy and peer relationships in Delta State.

Kani and Shetima (2025) reiterate the importance of counsellor curbing social vices through development of EI through unique programmes. Thus, in the current study, the authors examine

the emotional intelligence training effect on secondary school students in terms of the influence of counselling on empathy and peer relationship, which adds to the evidence-based approaches that foster emotional stability, collaboration and comprehensive youth growth.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescence is a crucial period when the state of emotional instability, identity formation, and peer impact are the main characteristics. In Delta State secondary schools, the rising cases of bullying, exclusion, and lack of conflict resolution point to the worsening peer relationships and poor emotional competence. A lot of students have emotional regulation and lack of empathy difficulties contributing to misunderstanding and social withdrawal. Despite their importance in the development of positive relationships and emotional adaptation, empathy and emotional intelligence is hardly discussed in schools curricula or counselling programmes.

Interventions in existence tend to be non-structured and not empirically validated. Although research papers like Bisji et al. (2019) and Jack and Oguntayo (2020) confirm that emotional intelligence can be trained, its effect through counselling on empathy and peer relationship in Delta State is not clear. There are also such challenges as scarce resources and lack of training in EI in counselling programmes (Igweilo et al., 2024). Therefore,this study investigates how well-organised EI counselling can lead to increased empathy and a better relationship between peers among students.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence training through counselling on enhancing empathy and peer relationship quality among secondary school students in Delta State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the effect of emotional intelligence counselling on students' levels of empathy.
2. Examine the effect of emotional intelligence counselling on students' peer relationship quality.
3. Compare the empathy levels between students who receive EI counselling and those who do not.
4. Assess the relationship between empathy and peer relationship quality among secondary school students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What is the effect of emotional intelligence counselling on students' levels of empathy?
2. How does emotional intelligence counselling influence peer relationship quality among students?

3. Is there a significant difference in empathy levels between students who receive EI counselling and those who do not?
4. What is the relationship between empathy and peer relationship quality among secondary school students?

Research Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses:

1. Emotional intelligence counselling has no significant effect on students' levels of empathy.
2. Emotional intelligence counselling has no significant effect on peer relationship quality among students.
3. There is no significant difference in empathy levels between students who receive EI counselling and those who do not.
4. There is no significant relationship between empathy and peer relationship quality among secondary school students.

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others to promote personal and social growth (Jack & Oguntayo, 2020). It includes self-awareness, regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Bisji et al., 2019), which allow people to cope with the challenges, preserve relations, and make effective social choices (Omumu, 2024). In contrast, EI focuses on emotional and social competence unlike IQ, which is significant at this stage of life when emotional sensitivity is highest (Kani & Shetima, 2025). It assists teenagers in overcoming peer influence, conflict management and social adaptation (Udeh & Ezeokafor, 2022). It can be taught via counselling and training (Emmanuel and Ogundokun, 2023); in case integrated into the school curricula, EI improves communication, decreases aggression, and increases emotional literacy, resilience as well as overall student well-being (Adeyemo et al., 2019; Igweilo et al., 2024).

Empathy

Empathy is the skill to recognize and experience the emotions and the thoughts of other people and is commonly referred to as putting oneself in the other person's shoes (Udeh & Ezeokafor, 2022). It has both emotional and mental elements (emotional resonance, and intellectual perspective-taking) (Arslan & İşeri, 2018). Empathy as an important social-emotional skill can lead to compassion, collaboration, and social bonding particularly at the adolescent stage when identity formation is paramount (Jack and Oguntayo, 2020). It is used to assist students in dealing with conflicts in a peaceful manner, valuing different opinions, and decreasing bullying (Trigueros et al., 2020; Bisji et al., 2019). Compassionate learners are ethical, morally conscious, and supportive of others (Omumu, 2024). Empathy has been confirmed to be enhanced by

emotional intelligence counselling, role-play, and reflection (Emmanuel and Ogundokun, 2023), peer relationship improvement, emotional welfare, academic achievement, and mental health (Adeyemo et al., 2019).

Peer Relationships

Peer relationships refer to those social interactions and connections between people within the same age, mainly in school (Igweilo et al., 2024). They play an important role in emotional, social, and cognitive development of teenagers, affecting behavior, self-esteem, and academic performance (Kani and Shetima, 2025). Trust, respect, cooperation, and good communication are the pillars of healthy relationships that provide the sense of belonging and guide adolescents by following social norms (Trigueros et al., 2020). Emotional stability and resilience, conflict management, and negative ones (bullying or exclusion) are improved by positive and worsened by negative peer relationships, respectively (Obungwah, 2022; Udeh & Ezeokafor, 2022). Peer relationship is highly dependent on emotional intelligence and empathy (Jack and Oguntayo, 2020). These relational skills are successfully developed as a result of school counseling and social-emotional learning programs and minimal conflict is mitigated (Bisji et al., 2019; Emmanuel & Ogundokun, 2023).

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Enhancing Interpersonal Relationships

Emotional intelligence (EI) enhances interpersonal relationships by enabling individuals to recognize, interpret, and respond appropriately to others' emotions (Jack & Oguntayo, 2020). Through self-awareness and empathy, individuals manage emotional triggers and understand different perspectives, fostering mutual respect and meaningful interactions (Udeh & Ezeokafor, 2022). During adolescence—a period of heightened emotional and social activity—EI supports effective communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution (Omumu, 2024; Trigueros et al., 2020). Research shows that emotionally intelligent students display less aggression, stronger social bonds, and improved peer relations (Bisji et al., 2019). Counselling programmes integrating EI training enhance relational competence, reduce disciplinary problems, and improve classroom harmony (Kani & Shetima, 2025). Moreover, EI encourages emotional support among peers, promoting inclusivity and a positive school climate (Emmanuel & Ogundokun, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory

Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory (1995) builds on Mayer and Salovey's (1990) work, emphasizing that EI is more crucial than IQ in achieving success. The theory identifies five components—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Goleman (1995) argues that individuals with high EI can recognize and manage emotions, motivate themselves, and maintain positive relationships. This is particularly relevant to adolescents, who often experience emotional volatility and peer conflicts. The theory underpins

this study by suggesting that EI can be developed through structured counselling to enhance empathy and peer relationships among students in Delta State (Jack & Oguntayo, 2020). Empirical studies support EI-based training for reducing aggression and improving school climate (Bisji et al., 2019; Adeyemo et al., 2019). Though critics note its descriptive nature and commercial overuse (Landy, 2005; Murphy, 2006), Goleman's model remains widely valued for its practical relevance in promoting emotional and social competence (Udeh & Ezeokafor, 2022).

Methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design to examine the effect of emotional intelligence (EI) counselling on empathy and peer relationships. Participants were divided into an experimental group, which received EI counselling, and a control group, which received no intervention. Both groups were assessed before and after the six-week programme using validated instruments. The quasi-experimental design was chosen because randomization was not feasible in school settings but allowed for comparison and control of internal validity threats through matched grouping and baseline assessments (Kourmousi et al., 2017).

The study population comprised Senior Secondary School II (SS2) students in public secondary schools across the three senatorial districts of Delta State. This group, aged 15–17 years, was selected because adolescence is a critical period for emotional and social development (Udeh & Ezeokafor, 2022). Public schools were chosen for their demographic uniformity and standardized curriculum, enhancing the generalizability of findings.

A sample of 120 students was selected through multistage sampling to ensure regional representation. Two local government areas were randomly selected from each senatorial district, and one public school from each LGA. Twenty SS2 students were then randomly chosen from each school, producing 60 participants in both experimental and control groups. This method minimized sampling bias and increased credibility through geographical spread and random selection (Kourmousi et al., 2017).

Three standardized instruments were used: the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), and the Peer Relationship Inventory (PRI). The SSEIT (Schutte et al., 1998) measured emotional intelligence across four dimensions on a 33-item, 5-point scale ($\alpha = 0.87$). The TEQ (Spreng et al., 2009), a 16-item empathy scale ($\alpha = 0.81$), captured emotional contagion and perspective-taking. The PRI, with 25 items ($\alpha = 0.85$), assessed trust, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Content validity was confirmed by expert review, and a pilot study produced Cronbach's alpha values of 0.85 (SSEIT), 0.81 (TEQ), and 0.83 (PRI), affirming reliability.

Data collection occurred in three phases: pretest, six-week EI counselling intervention, and posttest. The experimental group received weekly 60–75 minute counselling sessions, while the control group had no treatment. The programme, based on Goleman's EI framework, included

activities such as role-play, emotional journaling, and group discussions targeting self-awareness, emotional regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Jack & Oguntayo, 2020). Sessions were facilitated by trained counsellors and reviewed for cultural relevance.

Validity was ensured through matched grouping, standardized data collection, and separation of groups to prevent contamination. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics summarized demographics, while paired and independent t-tests assessed within- and between-group effects. Pearson's correlation examined the relationship between empathy and peer relationships, with significance set at 0.05.

Ethical approval was obtained from relevant authorities. Informed consent and parental permission were secured, anonymity maintained, and counselling conducted in safe environments. The study adhered to principles of confidentiality, beneficence, and non-malfeasance, ensuring participants' psychological well-being and the ethical integrity of the research.

Results

Table 1: *Pretest and Posttest Emotional Intelligence Scores of Experimental and Control Groups*

Group	N	Test Type	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Experimental	60	Pretest	112.34	8.56
Experimental	60	Posttest	132.47	7.93
Control	60	Pretest	111.89	8.44
Control	60	Posttest	113.12	8.27

Table 1 shows that the experimental group's mean emotional intelligence (EI) score increased from 112.34 (SD = 8.56) to 132.47 (SD = 7.93) after the six-week counselling, a significant 20.13-point gain. The control group's mean rose slightly from 111.89 (SD = 8.44) to 113.12 (SD = 8.27), indicating no meaningful improvement. This sharp contrast confirms the effectiveness of structured EI counselling in enhancing self-awareness, regulation, and interpersonal skills. Consistent with Jack and Oguntayo (2020) and Bisji et al. (2019), the findings show EI can be developed through guided training, supporting its integration into school counselling for improved social and emotional competence.

Table 2: *Pretest and Posttest Empathy Scores of Experimental and Control Groups*

Group	N	Test Type	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Experimental	60	Pretest	35.21	4.67
Experimental	60	Posttest	44.18	4.29
Control	60	Pretest	34.97	4.88
Control	60	Posttest	35.61	4.72

Table 2 shows a major rise in the experimental group's empathy scores from 35.21 (SD = 4.67) to 44.18 (SD = 4.29), an 8.97-point gain, while the control group's increase from 34.97 (SD = 4.88) to 35.61 (SD = 4.72) was minimal. This confirms that emotional intelligence counselling effectively enhanced empathy through activities like perspective-taking, emotional mirroring, and compassion-based communication. Consistent performance (low SDs) suggests uniform impact among participants. Aligned with Udeh and Ezeokafor (2022) and Kani and Shetima (2025), the findings show empathy is teachable, reducing bullying and improving cooperation—supporting EI-based counselling integration into Nigerian school programmes.

Table 3: *Pretest and Posttest Peer Relationship Scores of Experimental and Control Groups*

Group	N	Test Type	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Experimental	60	Pretest	48.73	6.12
Experimental	60	Posttest	59.86	5.77
Control	60	Pretest	47.91	6.27
Control	60	Posttest	48.64	6.13

Table 3 shows that the experimental group's peer relationship scores increased significantly from 48.73 (SD = 6.12) to 59.86 (SD = 5.77), an 11.13-point gain, while the control group's minimal rise from 47.91 (SD = 6.27) to 48.64 (SD = 6.13) was negligible. This demonstrates that emotional intelligence counselling effectively strengthened students' interpersonal skills through training in empathy, communication, and conflict resolution. Reduced SD values indicate consistent group benefits. Supporting Jack and Oguntayo (2020), the findings confirm EI's key role in fostering positive peer relations, improving school climate, reducing conflict, and promoting emotional and social competence among adolescents.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4: *Paired Sample T-Test for Pretest and Posttest Scores of Experimental Group*

Variable	Mean (Pretest)	Mean (Posttest)	Mean Difference	t-value	df	p-value
Emotional Intelligence	112.34	132.47	20.13	-7.82	59	0.000***
Empathy	35.21	44.18	8.97	-6.36	59	0.000***
Peer Relationship	48.73	59.86	11.13	-6.49	59	0.000***

*p < 0.001

Table 4 shows paired sample t-test results for the experimental group, revealing significant improvements (p = 0.000 < 0.05) in Emotional Intelligence, Empathy, and Peer Relationships after the intervention. EI scores rose from 112.34 to 132.47 (gain = 20.13; t = -7.82), confirming the counselling's effectiveness (Jack & Oguntayo, 2020; Bisji et al., 2019). Empathy increased from 35.21 to 44.18 (gain = 8.97; t = -6.36), supporting Udeh and Ezeokafor (2022) on empathy's teachability. Peer Relationship scores improved from 48.73 to 59.86 (gain = 11.13; t = -6.49), showing that EI counselling enhanced communication, trust, and social harmony among students.

Table 5: *Independent Sample T-Test Comparing Posttest Scores Between Experimental and Control Groups*

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Emotional Intelligence	Experimental	132.47	7.93	4.95	118	0.000***
	Control	113.12	8.27			
Empathy	Experimental	44.18	4.29	4.58	118	0.000***
	Control	35.61	4.72			
Peer Relationship	Experimental	59.86	5.77	5.02	118	0.000***
	Control	48.64	6.13			

*p < 0.001

Table 5 shows independent sample t-test results comparing posttest scores of experimental and control groups, revealing significant differences (p < 0.001) across all variables. The experimental group outperformed the control group in Emotional Intelligence (132.47 vs. 113.12; t = 4.95), Empathy (44.18 vs. 35.61; t = 4.58), and Peer Relationships (59.86 vs. 48.64; t = 5.02).

These findings confirm that emotional intelligence counselling effectively enhanced self-awareness, empathy, and social interaction skills. Consistent with Bisji et al. (2019) and Udeh and Ezeokafor (2022), the results demonstrate that EI training fosters emotional growth, conflict resolution, and interpersonal harmony among adolescents in Delta State schools.

Table 6: *Pearson Correlation Between Empathy and Peer Relationship Scores*

Variables	**N**	**r**	**p-value**
Empathy & Peer Relationship	120	0.726**	0.000***

r = Pearson correlation coefficient $p < 0.001$

Table 6 shows a strong, significant positive correlation between empathy and peer relationship scores ($r = 0.726$, $p = 0.000$) among 120 students. This indicates that higher empathy enhances students' ability to form supportive, cooperative peer relationships. Empathetic students better understand others' emotions, manage conflicts, and foster trust confirming empathy's mediating role in social development. Consistent with Omumu (2024), empathetic adolescents display stronger social bonds and fewer conflicts. Thus, integrating empathy-focused counselling within emotional intelligence training can promote emotional maturity, teamwork, and inclusiveness in Nigerian schools, validating the rejection of the fourth null hypothesis and reinforcing the study's conceptual model.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that emotional intelligence (EI) counselling significantly improved empathy among secondary school students in the experimental group, with a mean increase of 8.97 points on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire ($p < 0.001$). In contrast, the control group showed negligible change, confirming that structured EI interventions enhance adolescents' capacity to recognize and respond to others' emotions. This supports Udeh and Ezeokafor (2022), who found that EI and empathy are interrelated and can be jointly developed through reflective and interactive activities. Similarly, Jack and Oguntayo (2020) and Bisji et al. (2019) reported that EI training enhances emotional sensitivity, perspective-taking, and prosocial behavior among adolescents.

Counselling strategies such as role-play, storytelling, emotional mirroring, and perspective-swapping were instrumental in helping students understand emotions and build empathy. Emmanuel and Ogundokun (2023) noted that such therapy-based interventions effectively strengthen emotional connection in adolescents. These findings affirm that empathy is not a fixed trait but a learnable skill that can be cultivated through structured counselling programmes. This has vital implications for education in Delta State, suggesting that EI-based counselling can foster emotionally resilient and socially responsible youth.

The study also found that EI counselling significantly improved peer relationship quality, with the experimental group recording an 11.13-point increase post-intervention. This demonstrates that emotional competence acquired through EI training translates into positive social behaviour. Trigueros et al. (2020) found a similar link between EI and peer interaction quality, where students with higher EI experienced less bullying and stronger peer support. Likewise, Kani and Shetima (2025) reported that EI-oriented counselling reduces social vices and improves cooperation, as emotionally aware students communicate needs clearly, resolve conflicts empathetically, and build trust. Omumu (2024) also found that emotionally regulated adolescents display constructive peer behaviour, contributing to safer and more inclusive school environments.

These findings underscore Adeyemo et al.'s (2019) argument that adolescence is a crucial stage for psychosocial intervention, as peer validation and social competence directly affect academic success and mental health. The implication is clear: EI counselling should be central—not supplementary—in school guidance programmes, promoting balanced emotional and social development.

Furthermore, a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.726$, $p < 0.001$) was found between empathy and peer relationship quality, indicating that higher empathy levels lead to healthier peer interactions. This supports Arslan and İşeri (2018), who identified empathy as a key predictor of adolescents' ability to form meaningful relationships. Obungwah (2022) similarly found that low empathy correlates with aggression and delinquency, reinforcing empathy's protective role. Aihie and Nigeria (2018) emphasized empathy's importance in emotional maturity and conflict resolution, while Festus and Seraphina (2015) linked empathy development to better classroom participation and cooperative learning.

Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) counselling on empathy and peer relationship quality among secondary school students in Delta State, Nigeria. Using a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control design, findings showed that the six-week EI counselling significantly enhanced empathy and peer relationships in the experimental group, while the control group showed minimal change. The study confirmed that emotional intelligence is a learnable skill, not a fixed trait, and that empathy functions both as an outcome and a mechanism of EI development.

A strong correlation between empathy and peer relationships demonstrated that emotional understanding and regulation are essential for healthy adolescent interactions. Given the prevalence of bullying, poor conflict management, and emotional insensitivity in schools, these results highlight the potential of EI counselling to promote empathy, cooperation, and social inclusion.

Using validated instruments and robust statistical analyses strengthened the reliability of the findings. The study concludes that emotional intelligence counselling is an effective strategy for

enhancing students' social-emotional competence. Integrating EI into school counselling programmes can improve empathy, peer relationships, academic engagement, and overall school climate, preparing students for emotionally intelligent and socially responsible living within and beyond the school environment.

Implications for Counselling Practice and School Programmes

The study's findings have significant implications for counselling and school programmes in Nigeria. They highlight counselling's vital role beyond academics, emphasizing its function in developing students' emotional and social competencies. The positive impact of emotional intelligence (EI) counselling on empathy and peer relationships suggests that school counselling should be preventive and developmental.

Structured EI modules should be integrated into counselling programmes, focusing on self-awareness, regulation, empathy, and relationship management. Counsellors need adequate training, resources, and support to implement these effectively. Enhancing empathy through EI training can reduce bullying, conflict, and social exclusion, fostering a positive school climate.

Administrators and policymakers should prioritize EI within school development plans and encourage teacher–counsellor collaboration to reinforce EI principles. Counsellor training curricula should include EI theory and practice, while continuous professional development should promote evidence-based, data-driven approaches to ensure accountability, improvement, and emotionally intelligent school environments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Emotional intelligence development should be formally included in school counselling programmes across Delta State and beyond to promote empathy, social competence, and conflict resolution among students.
2. School counsellors should be provided with professional training on emotional intelligence counselling techniques and the use of standardized EI assessment tools to improve the quality of their interventions.
3. Teachers should work closely with counsellors to reinforce emotional intelligence skills in the classroom through supportive learning environments, emotional modelling, and reinforcement of social skills.
4. Ministries of Education should support the creation and dissemination of culturally relevant emotional intelligence counselling materials and facilitate regular workshops, seminars, and conferences on EI in education.
5. EI interventions should be conducted in small group formats to promote peer learning, emotional openness, and interpersonal bonding among students.

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS PREDICTOR OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG STUDENTS IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES OF NORTH CENTRAL, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management among learners in Federal universities of North Central, Nigeria. The study used a correlational research design. The general population for The research covered146,252 undergraduate pupils in 7 Federal universities in North Central, Nigeria. Asample of 754 students was. drawn from four Federal universities in North central Nigeria using proportionate, stratified sampling technique. Data was collected using an adapted version of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Simple regression analysis was used to examine the data collected. The results of According to the report, self-awareness is an important predictor of conflict management among Federal university students in North Central, Nigeria and that empathy is a significant predictor of conflict management among Federal university students in North Central, Nigeria. Considering these conclusions, it was suggested that Federal universities ought to host workshops, seminars, and. short courses aimed at improving students' self- awareness and empathy skills in order to help manage cases of conflict that may arise in various universities. It was also recommended that Emotional intelligence skills such as empathy be incorporated into general studies or entrepreneurship education courses of universities to ensure that all students acquire vital interpersonal skills.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Self-Awareness, Empathy, conflict management.

Introduction

Universities are environments characterized by diversity, where Students come together from a variety of sociocultural, economic, and religious backgrounds. to pursue academic goals.

This convergence often results in varied opinions, interests, and expectations which, while enriching, can also give rise to interpersonal conflicts. Conflict among students is not uncommon and may stem from differences in personality, misunderstandings during group projects, peer competition, or even clashes in values and beliefs. Over the past the few years, there has been a rise in concern Over The prevalence of the student conflicts within Nigerian universities. Reports of disagreements escalating into physical confrontations, damaging social relationships, and negatively impacting academic focus are not uncommon. Despite the presence of counseling units and institutional policies designed to promote harmony, the challenge persists, suggesting that underlying individual competencies necessary for managing conflicts may be lacking. Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon due to people's complexity and diversity. Especially within the university system. Differences in views, ideologies, emotions, thoughts, attitudes, personalities, cultures, and environmental elements all contribute to human complexity and diversity. The types of disputes that arise within the management process Federal Universities inside North Central, Nigeria differs from one institution to another. Conflicts between students, between students and teachers, and between teachers and the school administration are all possible within the educational system. Interactions between members of a certain group give rise to conflict institution. The rate with which disputes arise in Federal universities in the Federal universities of Nigeria may hinder the efficient instruction and learning required to meet educational objectives, necessitating the right management of conflict (Rotimi, 2020).

In 2020, students' conflict in North Central Nigerian universities were driven by poor funding, inadequate facilities and increased school fees. This often resulted in violent confrontations, closures and disruptions to academic calendar. Therefore, Ineffectively managed conflicts can turn into dangerous circumstances by causing tension that lowers instructors' morale in carrying out their duties, which hinders effective teaching and learning. (Ndum & Maris, 2013). Emotional intelligence has become a psychological concept. of interest in recognizing how people navigate social complexities. It describes the capacity to see, comprehend, regulate, and efficiently manage emotions in self and in relating with others. Emotional intelligence encompasses key domains such as self-awareness, control over emotions, empathy, drive, and social abilities all of which are relevant in managing interpersonal disputes. Studies have indicated that people with higher The ability to feel emotions tend to be better at resolving conflicts amicably, maintaining healthier relationships, and fostering collaborative environments (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011).In general and in the context of education, emotions are the main forces behind attitudes and behaviours that impact both mental and physical health. Emotional intelligence comprises of various components or aspects among which comprises of self-awareness and empathy.

Kendra (2024) defined self-awareness as the capacity to concentrate on oneself as well as how One's ideas, feelings, and behaviours all conform to internal norms. Self-knowledge describes how A single person consciously understands his/her character, feeling and desires. It is

the condition or capacity for seeing, feeling, or being aware of things, events, or sensory patterns. An observer at this level of consciousness can validate sensory information without necessarily comprehending it. self-The experience of a common social identity and collective self-consciousness are related to awareness. From this perspective self-awareness indicates a conscious understanding of one's place in a larger, interconnected group. People from different cultures and social groupings may have the "we feeling" or the "sense of us." Social unity can be experienced by individuals through the experience of a collectively shared social identity. Social awareness may also stimulate working towards a common goal. Ayesa and Huma (2025)), stressed that self-awareness tend to have a high impact on academic achievement which will subsequently reveal the leadership qualities in the students.

Self-empathy on the other hand, is the capacity to understand or feel what others are experiencing. From within their frame of experience, that is, the capacity to place Oneself in another's position. It encompasses understanding the emotions of others or how they feel. Types of empathy include cognitive empathy, somatic empathy and spiritual empathy (Read, 2019). Apart from self-empathy, another essential component of emotional intelligence is self-awareness. Self-awareness refers to the act of extending empathy to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering. A student who exhibits a self-empathy feelings will put other classmates into considerations, when solving problem and share the solution with them. He will be ready to share the solutions with them. He will be ready to share
ideas with others and likewise learn from them as they cooperatively solve problems together.

Another vital component of emotional skills is self-awareness. Given the critical nature of peer interactions in university life, understanding how emotional intelligence predicts students' approach to conflict management is essential. It holds implications not only for students' personal development but also for creating peaceful academic communities that support learning and holistic well-being.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interactions, especially in diverse social settings like universities. However, the inability of students in Federal universities (especially within North Central, Nigeria) to handle conflicts constructively has led to strained peer relationships, disruptions in academic work, psychological distress, and in extreme cases, violence. Various researchers and stakeholders have attributed this ugly trend to the poor climate inherent in most of the universities while others have blamed it on poor management strategies adopted by managers of higher institutions of learning in managing conflict within the school system. There is however a growing concern that other factors may be responsible for this ugly trend in student achievement and prominent among such factors is the unbalanced state of the learners in terms of self-awareness-getting to know who really, they are as individuals and empathy-understanding and

sharing the feelings of others. The emotional state of students in the university system has been worrisome as most of them have not been able to exhibit a considerable level of emotional intelligence in the course of managing conflicts within the university system. As a result, the rate of conflict within the universities of North Central, Nigeria been alarming and most times, escalates into acts of violence. Despite these growing concerns, there has been limited research on the specific influence on how emotional intelligence of students predicts conflict management among students in Federal Universities of North Central, Nigeria. The aim of learning in any higher institution of learning is to attain improved learning outcomes, but this may never become a reality if learners are not guided towards enhancing their emotional intelligence skills. It is based on this realization that the current study is set to investigate emotional intelligence of students as a predictor of conflict management examine among students in federal universities of North Central, Nigeria

Aim/Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate emotional intelligence as predictor of conflict management among students in federal universities of north central, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. examine the extent to which self-awareness predicts conflict management among federal university students in North Central, Nigeria.
2. determine the extent to which empathy predicts conflict management among federal university students in North Central, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered in the course of this study

1. To what extent does self-awareness predict conflict management among Federal University students?
2. To what extent does empathy predict conflict management among Nigerian university students?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Self-awareness does not significantly predict conflict management among Federal university students in North Central Nigeria.
2. empathy does not significantly predict conflict management among Federal university students in North Central, Nigeria.

Theoretical Review

Peter Salovey and John Mayer ability model as well as The mixed model of emotional intelligence developed by The mixed model of emotional intelligence developed by Daniel

Goleman was adopted for the study. Mayer defined Four separate yet connected cognitive skills make up emotional intelligence. emotional skills: seeing, utilising, understanding, and managing feelings. Unlike mixed models, this framework considers emotional intelligence to be true intelligence that is measurable through performance tests (MSCEIT). It is highly relevant to conflict management as it provides the mental tools required to de-escalate tensions, empathize with others and reach collaborative solutions. The Mayer and Salovey model moves beyond logical, rational approaches to address the emotional "hot" intelligence during conflicts in higher institutions of learning.

Daniel Goleman's mixed According to the emotional intelligence concept, emotional intelligence is a set of competencies-comprising of abilities, behaviours and personality traits which determine How effectively individual s manage themselves and their relationships. Unlike models focusing strictly on cognitive ability, Goleman's model, popularized in the 1990s, highlights five core components that can be learned and developed. Among them are self-awareness, self-regulation. social abilities, empathy, and drive In relevance to handling disputes, Daniel Goleman's model offers a structure for Dealing with the sentimental, rather than just the logical, underpinnings of interpersonal disagreements, fostering collaboration over confrontation. Goleman's model shifts conflict management from a purely rational negotiation process to one that includes emotional intelligence.

Literature Review

Umar (2016) investigated emotional intelligence in terms of empathy and dispute resolution in a few Federal colleges in Nigeria's South East Zone. Personality trait theory served as the foundation for this investigation. The research employed survey research design, The study's 2271 participants were drawn from the corresponding federal universities in Nigeria's South East Zone. Two institutions were chosen among a total of six (6) universities in the zone using the purposeful or judgemental sampling technique. A sample size of 340 was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, and copies of the questionnaire were distributed to each university using Bowley's proportionate allocation formula. The results showed a strong positive relationship between empathy (emotional awareness self-evaluation). And obliging style of handling conflict resolution in the southeast region of Nigeria.The previous study discussed Federal universities in South East Zone of Nigeria While the Present study covered Federal Universities in North Central, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the previous study while the current study adopted correlation research design Iyala and Agbudu. (2023) examined the connection between principals' emotional intelligence in the aspect of self-awareness and handling conflict in Nigeria's Niger State secondary schools. The correlational survey research design was used in the study. 3895 employees made up the study's population. 520 respondents made up the study's sample size. The data was collected using two instruments. Data analysis was conducted

using Pearson's product moment correlation. The study's conclusions demonstrated a weak positive significant correlation between conflict management and the self-awareness of Niger State secondary school principals, as well as a weak positive significant correlation between conflict management and the social awareness of Niger State secondary school principals. The previous study covered secondary schools in Niger state, Nigeria while the current study covered Federal universities in North Central, Nigeria. Pearson's product moment correlation was ultilized for data analysis in the previous examination while simple regression analysis was adopted for the current study.

Manal etal (2023) examined the link between conflict resolution techniques and emotional intelligence from theNurse Managers' position. A cross-sectional, quantitative correlation design was used in the investigation. This study involved 21 facilities in the Aseer region that are linked to the Saudi Ministry of Health. Twenty-one head nurses with at least a year of experience as head nurses or managers made up the non-probability sample. Three parts of an online survey were used: socio demographic, trait emotional intelligence, and conflict management. Findings showed that There was a statistically significant correlation between emotional intelligence and gender identity. Similarly, there is a substantial correlation between conflict management tactics and nationality, marital status, and monthly income. The previous study covered a nursing school in Aseer region of Saudi Arabia while the current study covered Federal universities in North Central, Nigeria. Cross-sectional research design was adopted for the previous research while correlation research design was used for the current study.

Ufomba et al (2025) investigated the interaction between interpersonal conflict resolution practices at higher education institutions and emotional intelligence abilities in Nigeria. A The survey approach used was descriptive. A sample size of 400 was chosen from the 13,570 work forces in the population using the Yamane formula. A carefully designed questionnaire was used to gather data. utilizing the five-point Likert scale method. The data was analysed using regression analysis. Results indicated that emotional intelligence skills such as self-awareness was strongly and significantly correlated with conflict management. The previous study covered higher education institutions in Nigeria. while the current inquiry was carried out in Federal universities of North Central, Nigeria.The study design used was a descriptive survey. previous study while correlation research design was employed for the current study.

Uwaleke (2024) investigated the connection between conflict resolution and the emotional intelligence of secondary school administrators in Benue State, Nigeria's Benue South Senatorial District. To direct the investigation, three research questions and their corresponding three hypotheses were developed. For this study, a correlational survey research design was used. 2140 people in total—97 principals and 2043 teachers—were drawn from all 97 senior secondary schools for this study. 322 respondents (19 principals and 303 teachers) made up the study's sample size, which was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's table of requirements for calculating sample size from a given population. The Principal Emotional Intelligence and

Conflict Management Questionnaire (PEICMQ) was the tool utilised to collect the data. The research issues were addressed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, and the hypotheses were analysed at a 0.05 level of significance using Pearson's product-moment correlation. According to the study's findings, conflict management and principals' self-awareness are positively and significantly correlated in secondary schools in the Benue South Senatorial District. Nigeria..

The previous study covered secondary schools in Benue State's Benue South Senatorial District Nigeria. while the current investigation covered Federal universities in North Central, Nigeria.Pearson's correlation of product moments was used for data analysis in the previous research while simple Regression was employed to examine information for the current study.

Amedome et al (2025) conducted a study to examine the association between part-time executive students in the Business Management Department's Conflict Management Styles (CMS) and Emotional Intelligence (EI). The study demonstrated the importance of each EI sub-competence in conflict management. To evaluate the suggested theories, 200 individuals' responses were examined. The study added to and expanded the body of previous literature by focusing on the cultural dimensions between Asia and Africa. The link between the EI and CMS sub-competencies was determined using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. The results showed that, with the exception of social skills, EI competences significantly improved CMS.

The previous study covered communities with Asia-Africa cultural dimensions. while the current study covered Federal universities in North Central, Nigeria. Multiple Regression analysis was used to examine the data. in the previous study while simple regression was employed to analyze data for the current inquiry. Prital (2022) examined the connection between conflict resolution and self-awareness Quantitative The study's research design was chosen. An example of 400 participants was picked for the research utilizing snowball Taking samples method. The Schutte Self-Report Scale Measuring Emotion Intelligence Scale was developed to gather information for the research. Information was gathered and Pearson's product moment correlation analysis was used. statistics,outcomes showed positive correlation between conflict resolution and self-awareness.

The previous investigation make use of the quantitative research design while correlation research design was applied in the current study. Pearson’s product moment correlation statistics was employed to analyze data in the previous study while the current study used simple regression analysis.

Saudi and Hinacay (2025) evaluated teachers' conflict resolution preferences and emotional intelligence using causal and correlational research methodologies. 152 secondary school teachers from 3 sampling schools took part in it. It used a modified questionnaire to achieve the study's goals. The questionnaire's first section evaluated teachers' emotional intelligence, while its second

section addressed their preference for conflict resolution. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis, Pearson product-moment correlation, mean, and standard deviation.

According to the study, teachers exhibited a high degree of Conflict avoidance and emotional intelligence resolution. The previous study covered teachers in secondary schools whereas the current investigation concentrated on university pupils. The previous examination employed the used a combination of correlation and design of causal research meanwhile a correlational study approach was used in the ongoing research. Pearson's product moment correlation statistics was employed to analyze data in the previous study while the current study used simple regression analysis.

Methodology

This research used a correlational survey design. The design was considered appropriate because the primary aim to determine The link between conflict resolution and emotional intelligence When it comes to university students, without manipulating any of the variables. According to Nworgu (2015), a correlational design is suitable for examining the degree of association between two or more variables as they naturally occur. In this research, emotional intelligence serves as the predictor variable while conflict management is the criterion variable. The population of this study comprised 146,252 full-time undergraduate students of 7 Federal universities in North Central, Nigeria. An entire sample of 754 undergraduate students in 4 randomly selected universities was taken from the Federal universities utilizing stratified random sampling. with a structured instrument tagged Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Scale (EICOMAS) was created by the investigator for the purpose of gathering data.

The instrument contained 20 items that assess how two key components relevant to this study: self-awareness and empathy predict conflict management. Responses were evaluated using a four-point The Likert scaled format based on the of Strongly Agree (SA)-4, Agree (A)-3, Strongly Disagree (SD)-2, and Disagree (D)-1. The instruments were subjected to content and face validation by three specialists in counseling psychology and assessment and measurement from Nigerian universities. They reviewed the instruments for clarity, cultural relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Recommendations were used to modify ambiguous items and ensure suitability for the Nigerian undergraduate context. In the process a validity index of 0.74 was obtained. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted involving 50 undergraduate students from a university outside the main study locations. Data collected from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha to establish internal consistency. This yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.79, indicating acceptable reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Data was analyzed using simple regression analysis. The R-values of regression analysis was used to answer the research questions while the p-values obtained from the ANOVA summary table of regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Simple regression was deemed

appropriate for analyzing the data because it involved the testing of two variables unlike multiple regression which is employed when there exist more than two variables to be tested.

Results

Research Question 1: To what degree is self-awareness a predictor of conflict management among university students in North Central Nigeria?

Table 1: *Model Summary of Regression Showing Self-Awareness as Predictor of Conflict Management among Nigerian University Students*

Variables	N	R	R^2	Beta	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error
Self-Awareness	754	0.68	0.46	.824	0.45	4.35
Conflict Management	754					

Table 1 indicates the regression analysis summary table indicating the extent to which self-awareness is predictor of conflict management of conflict management among university students in North Central Nigeria. results indicate that given a sample size of 754, the calculated value of regression (R) was given as 0.68. this value is high. Furthermore, the beta value is given as 0.824. This value is sufficiently high. Hence Being self-aware is a strong predictor of conflict management among federal university students in North Central Nigeria.

Research Question 2: To what degree is empathy a predictor of conflict management among Nigerian university students?

Table 2: *Model Summary of Regression Showing Empathy as Predictor of Conflict Management among Nigerian University Students*

Variables	**N**	**R**	**R^2**	**Beta**	**Adjusted R^2**	**Std. Error**
Empathy	754	0.72	0.52	. 707	0.51	4.37
Conflict Management	754					

Table 2 indicates the regression analysis summary table indicating the extent to which empathy is An indication of conflict resolution among university students in North Central Nigeria. results indicate that with a sample size of754, the calculated value of regression (R) was given as 0.72. this value is high. Furthermore, the beta value is given as 0.707. This value is sufficiently high. Hence empathy is strong a predictor of conflict management among federal university students in North Central Nigeria

Hypothesis 1: Self-awareness is not a significant predictor of conflict management among Nigerian university students.

Table 3: *ANOVA Summary of Regression Analysis on Self-awareness as a predictor of conflict*

management

Source	SS	df	R^2	MS	F Value	Beta	p-value
Regression	1904.62	1	0.46	1904.62	58.37	.823	0.000
Residual	2250.13	752		5.89			
Total	4164.75	753					

Table 3 indicates the ANOVA summary regression table indicating the extent to which self-awareness is a predictor of conflict management of conflict management among university students in North Central Nigeria. Results indicate that F (1, 752) = 58.37, p < .001, with self-awareness accounting for 46% of the variance in conflict management scores (R^2 = .46)**.**Furthermore, the beta value at 0.823 indicates that self-awareness is strongly predictive of conflict management. Hence, self-awareness is a significant predictor of conflict management among federal university students in North Central Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: Empathy is not a significant predictor of conflict management among Nigerian university students.

Table 4: *ANOVA Summary of Regression Analysis on Empathy as a Predictor of Conflict Management*

Source	SS	df	R^2	MS	F value	Beta	p-value
Regression	1922.64	1	0.52	1922.64	45.12	.675	0.000
Residual	2104.16	752		5.51			
Total	3936.80	753					

Table 4 indicates the ANOVA summary regression table indicating the extent to which empathy is a predictor of conflict management of conflict management among university students in North Central Nigeria. Results indicate that F (1, 382) = 45.12, p < .001, with empathy accounting for 52% of the variance in conflict management scores (R^2 = .52)**.** Furthermore, the beta value at 0.657 indicates that self-awareness is strongly predictive of conflict management. Hence, empathy is a significant predictor of conflict management among federal university students in North Central Nigeria

Discussion

Findings on hypothesis 1 indicated that self-awareness is a significant predictor of conflict management among federal university students in North Central Nigeria. Findings on the study agree or is similar to those of findings of the findings of this study revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between principals ' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Benue South Senatorial District, Nigeria. The implications of the findings

therefore implies that when students are fully conscious of their personality, it guides them in

managing conflicts that may arise around them. It also helps in taking rational decisions that can help in resolving conflicts that may arise in their universities. Students with high self-awareness can observe their effectiveness, and adjust them accordingly. Furthermore, they can better manage their emotions, leading to more constructive conflict management approaches. When related to Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) suggests that people learn behaviours including conflict management styles. Self-awareness, a key component of SLT, enables individuals to reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and actions, influencing their conflict management approach.

Findings on hypothesis 2 indicated that empathy is a significant predictor of conflict management among federal university students in North Central Nigeria. findings on the study agree or is similar to those of Umar (2016) which indicated there is a significant relationship between empathy and conflict management in selected Federal universities in South East Zone of Nigeria. The implications of the findings therefore implies that when students develop a considerable level of empathy in the course of relating with others, they tend to be considerate and compassionate when managing conflicts that may arise in the course of their academic endeavors in schools.

Conclusion

The study reveals that self-awareness and empathy are crucial predictors of conflict management among university students in North Central, Nigeria. These findings underscore the importance of socio-emotional skills in navigating conflicts effectively. By integrating self-awareness and empathy training into university programmes, educators can empower students to manage conflicts constructively, fostering healthier relationships among students in universities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made for the study:

1. It is recommended the management of Federal universities should organize workshops, seminars, and short courses aimed at improving students' self- awareness skills in order to help manage cases of conflict that may arise in various universities.
2. It is also recommended that Emotional intelligence skills such as empathy be incorporated into general studies or entrepreneurship education courses of universities to ensure that all students acquire vital interpersonal skills.

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COUNSELLING AS AN ALTERNATIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGY IN TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study on counselling as an alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. The survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised academic staff of three tertiary educational institutions: Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden, 164 academic staff; Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit, 159 academic staff; and Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, 128 academic staff. This gave a total population of 451 academic staff. The proportional sampling technique was used in drawing a sample size of 126 respondents representing 28% of the population. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated for the study. Data collection was done using a researcher-developed instrument: 'Counselling as an Alternative Conflict Resolution Strategy in Tertiary Educational Institutions' (CACRSTEI) Questionnaire. The instrument was duly validated and trial tested with a reliability coefficient of 0.91. The research questions were answered using weighted mean, while the null hypotheses were tested using independent t-test. The results indicated no significant difference in the mean responses of the male and female academic staff on the utilization and efficacy of counselling as alternative conflict resolution strategy in the institutions. It was concluded that counselling skills are employed and are effective as alternative conflict resolution strategy in resolving conflicts in tertiary educational institutions. It was recommended that counsellors in tertiary educational institutions should emphasize and encourage staff in positions of authority on the utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in the institutions.

Keywords: Counselling, Conflict Resolution Strategy, Emotional Intelligence, Utilization, Tertiary Educational Institutions,

Introduction

Conflict is an inherent part of human organizations, tertiary educational institutions are not exempt. Conflicts can arise due to various factors such as differences in opinion, communication breakdowns, power struggles, and conflicting goals. Left unresolved, conflicts can have

detrimental effects on employee morale, job satisfaction, teamwork, and ultimately, organizational performance. It is imperative, therefore, that tertiary educational institutions employ effective conflict resolution strategy to manage interpersonal and team conflicts in the institutions. This can be done through counselling, which is a process of helping an individual to develop and accept an integrated picture of his/her aptitude, abilities, interest and interpersonal needs to achieve maximum adjustment to the environment, so that the individual can be more effective in his/her carrier, satisfied with his/her work and be useful to the society in which he/she lives. Educational institutions struggle to address conflicts in a timely and efficient manner, leading to prolonged tension, decreased productivity, and increased employee turnover. Without proper conflict resolution strategy, tertiary educational institutions may face long-lasting consequences, including a toxic work culture and decreased employee engagement.

Consequently, this study holds significant importance for tertiary educational institutions and individuals operating within the workplace environment. By identifying and implementing effective alternative conflict resolution strategy, tertiary educational institutions can create a more harmonious work environment, fostering positive relationships among employees. This, in turn, can lead to improved employee satisfaction, increased productivity, and enhanced overall institutional performance. Moreover, individuals within the institutions can benefit from acquiring counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy, enabling them to handle conflicts constructively and professionally, both within and outside of the institution.

Conflict resolution is a counselling skill (Pearce, 2019). Counsellors are in a unique place both to promote the utilization of conflict resolution skills and to use counselling skills while practicing conflict resolution for longer lasting and therapeutic resolutions. Two environments in which counsellors have been especially active regarding conflict resolution have been in educational institutions and in the family (Moore, 2018). Professional counsellors provide services not only to ensure quality in education and carrier success, but also to help individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to identify opinions, explore alternatives and succeed in life peacefully. Counselling in a conflict situation is very helpful and beneficial in many ways both to the individuals and the organization. It helps the disputing parties to understand themselves and reflect on their viewpoints. Counselling seeks to let the parties approach the situation in a more objective manner, and allows them to develop new perspectives. The realization gotten from counselling helps develop a positive outlook and desirable attitude towards the situation. With a change in perception, the individuals are motivated to find out alternative solutions to the cause of the conflict. Counselling during conflict prepares the individuals to manage the situation objectively. The problem of this study therefore is the prevalence of interpersonal and team conflicts in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State and the lack of effective resolution strategies. The study intends to bridge the gap in literature on counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy.

Research (De Dreu & Van De Vliert, 2020) indicates that contrary to our culture's tendency to avoid conflict, conflict, when managed in constructive and healthy ways, is positive for

institutions, relationships, and the work force. Seeing conflict as an opportunity for creativity, growth, and learning instead of pain and humiliation is a reframe of conflict that helps to avoid ineffective ways of dealing with conflict (Coulson, 2020). According to Johnson and Johnson (1996) conflict contributes to both attraction to and understanding of relationships, greater productivity and creativity and integration of seemingly opposing interests in schools and in business. They suggested stimulating conflict while ensuring that conflicts will be managed in constructive and healthy ways.

Adham (2023) emphasized the importance of conflict resolution in team dynamics, focusing on understanding the nature of conflicts and identifying the most effective skills for resolution. The research explored various conflict types, including task-related and interpersonal conflicts, and examined how factors such as communication breakdowns or differing perspectives contribute to conflict escalation. The study investigated the efficacy of conflict resolution skills such as active listening, negotiation, and collaboration in addressing conflicts constructively. Effective conflict resolution enhances team cohesion, communication, and productivity, while unresolved conflicts may lead to decreased morale and performance. Understanding conflict dynamics and employing appropriate resolution skills are critical for fostering positive team outcomes.

In their study, Jordan et al. (2021) underscored the significance of managing emotions during team problem-solving, particularly through emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution skills. The study explored how individuals with higher EI levels exhibit better conflict management skills, including empathy, self-awareness, and impulse control, leading to more constructive resolutions. Furthermore, effective emotion regulation within teams contributes to enhanced problem-solving processes, communication, and decision-making. Conversely, poor emotional management may escalate conflicts and hinder productivity. Therefore, understanding the interplay between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution is pivotal for promoting positive team dynamics and optimizing performance outcomes in problem-solving contexts.

Kilag et al. (2024) examined administrators' conflict management strategies, highlighting their significance in organizational dynamics. The study delved into the role of administrators in addressing conflicts among staff, stakeholders, and within organizational structures. The research explored various conflict management approaches employed by administrators, including mediation, negotiation, and collaboration, and assesses their effectiveness in resolving disputes and promoting organizational harmony. Additionally, the study investigated the impact of administrators' leadership styles, communication skills, and emotional intelligence on conflict resolution outcomes. Effective conflict management by administrators fosters a positive work environment, enhances productivity, and cultivates trust and respect among organizational members. Understanding administrators' conflict management strategies is crucial for promoting organizational effectiveness and employee well-being.

Valente and Lourenço (2020) highlighted the impact of teachers' emotional intelligence (EI)

on conflict management within the classroom setting. Study delved into how teachers with higher EI levels demonstrate greater adeptness in addressing conflicts among students, fostering a conducive learning environment. Research explored the role of EI components such as empathy, self-regulation, and social skills in effectively managing classroom conflicts, promoting positive interactions, and minimizing disruptions to learning. Conversely, teachers with lower EI may struggle to manage conflicts, leading to negative outcomes such as increased tension, decreased student engagement, and compromised classroom dynamics. Understanding the influence of teachers' EI on conflict management is crucial for promoting a harmonious and productive learning environment.

The study is therefore carried out to determine the extent of utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State; and also to determine the efficacy of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in the state.

Counselling as an Alternative Conflict Resolution Strategy

Generally, a number of people view conflict as something undesirable, an enemy to effective group functioning and organizational performance. The word conflict is associated with pain, disharmony, and anger by most people (Borisoff & Victor, 2018). The way people deal with conflict is often a reflex strategy based on fear and past experiences (Kottler, 2021). Yet, conflict is an intimate part of our lives and something the counsellors address in other people's lives as well as their own on a daily basis. Because people are in conflict with others, inner values and thoughts, or the environment, conflict resolution is a primary reason people seek counselling (Nugent, 2020). Counselling is concerned with the feelings, attitudes and emotional dispositions of an individual about himself and the situations facing him. Counselling is devised to provide an interacting relationship in which the counsellor attempts to help an individual to better himself in relation to his present and future problems. Employee counselling for conflict situations has to be carefully undertaken by both the counsellor and the person being counselled. Since the process may be sensitive and susceptible to feelings, the counsellor should be in the right position to conduct the process. An effective counsellor is a good and effective listener. Advice should be concrete and encouraging. The counsellor must help boost the self-esteem of the person and create a positive stance.

Skills used in counselling are the skills used in conflict resolution. They include communication skills, interpersonal skills, strategic skills, leadership skills, emotional intelligence, empathy and creating problem solving. Others are building rapport, active listening, reframing, self-control, anxiety reduction, searching for things held in common, defining differences, looking for positive intentions, and defining needs and wants (Arezzo, Hendrix, Roedell & Slaby, 2020). Both the structure and the skills involved in conflict resolution are similar to those in counselling.

Communication skills according to Doyle (2019) refer to the ability to interact well with

others. According to these scholars, the term 'well' refers to accuracy, clarity, comprehensibility, coherence, expertise, effectiveness and appropriateness. Much unnecessary conflict can be avoided simply with clear, accurate written and verbal communication; a single lost email could lead to failed plans and fingers pointed. Assumptions about what other people already know, think, or intend can cause resentment. Many people argue purely because they want to feel heard. Simply being a good listener can be enough to inspire trust and resolve hurt feelings. Good communication skills that enhance conflict resolution include (Doyle, 2019).

i. *Active Listening:* Hearing and understanding the perspectives of all parties involved.
ii. *Effective Communication:* Clearly expressing thoughts, needs, and concerns.
iii. *Emotional Intelligence:* Recognizing and managing one's own emotions, as well as those of others.
iv. *Empathy:* Understanding and sharing the feelings of others.
v. *Problem-Solving:* Identifying and addressing underlying issues.

Interpersonal skills are the skills that are not directly related to a specific job. They are necessary for any position since they are mainly concerned with relationships with other people (Cimatti, 2016). Interpersonal skill is a cluster of qualities, habits, personality traits, attitudes and social graces, which everyone tends to possess in varying degrees throughout their life and are necessary for everyday life just as much as they are necessary for work (Ibrahim, Boerhannoeddin and Bakare, 2017). Interpersonal skills are one of the variables that determine the ability of leaders to distribute the vision, mission, and goals of the organization to its subordinates. Several studies show that interpersonal skills can increase the ability of top managers (Hunt and Baruch, 2003), which can be achieved if leaders have high social skills (Hayes, 2002). Interpersonal communication skills also enhance organizational commitment so managers must develop their ability to direct subordinates in achieving organizational goals (Mitchell, Patterson, Skinner, Ross and White, 2010). Interpersonal skills in conflict resolution involve:

i. Building Trust: Establishing credibility and rapport.
ii. Effective Feedback: Constructive communication.
iii. Non-Defensiveness: Remaining open-minded and receptive.
iv. Flexibility: Adapting to changing situations.
v. Cultural Competence: Understanding diverse perspectives.

Strategic skills focus on developing internally consistent human resource activities to build employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities in an effort to improve performance and achieve organizational goals and objectives (Junita, 2016). Aligning organizational strategies with human resource activities helps the organization in three ways. In the first place, the organization can adapt to a change because the time from the conception to the execution of a strategy is shortened. Secondly, the organization can better meet customer demands because its customer service

strategies have been translated into specific policies and practices. Third and lastly, the organization can achieve both financial and non-financial performance through its effective execution of strategy. Effective utilization of strategic skills enables the leader manage conflicts timely avoiding its escalation. Strategic skills used in conflict resolution include:

i. Conflict Prevention: Anticipating and mitigating conflicts.
ii. Policy Development: Establishing clear guidelines.
iii. Communication Planning: Managing information flow.
iv. Stakeholder Engagement: Building relationships.
v. Evaluation and Review: Assessing conflict resolution outcomes.

Leadership skills are critical to organizational success, especially with the presence of a culturally diverse workforce (Huguet, 2017). Effective leadership enhances the level of entrepreneurial activities, outcomes of mergers and acquisitions, and employee behavioural attributes such as motivation, absenteeism, and engagement (Huguet, 2017). Therefore, effective leaders create a supportive work environment and culture that sustain organizational change and ultimately improve performance (Baškarada, Watson & Cromarty, 2017). Furthermore, organizations must invest in developing the leadership skills of their employees (Gotsis & Grimani, 2016) to ensure optimum performance. Specifically, leaders should develop skills in:

i. Visionary Leadership: Guiding conflict resolution efforts.
ii. Decision-Making: Timely, informed decisions.
iii. Accountability: Taking responsibility.
iv. Collaboration: Fostering teamwork.
v. Emotional Stability: Managing stress.

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to understand one's own feelings and those of others, and to handle those feelings well. People who have high emotional intelligence are good at identifying and meeting the needs of others while taking responsibility for their own needs and feelings. This could be done by: being adaptable; being analytical; asserting feelings; compromising; showing curiosity; forgiving transgressions; helping others; identifying triggers; recognizing improvements; setting ground rules; showing respect; modifying behaviour; being motivated; and being optimistic.

Empathy means feeling what others feel. The ability to see a situation from someone else's viewpoint, and to understand their needs, motivations, and possible misunderstandings, is critical to effective conflict management. Some people are naturally more empathetic than others, but empathy can be developed. Empathy is augmented by an intellectual understanding of another's situation, since emotional empathy alone can sometimes create complicated scenarios. Empathy is best applied in a work environment when paired with critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and other types of discernment. Hallmarks of empathy include: accountability; asking for feedback; building trust; showing compassion; embracing diversity and inclusion; giving constructive

feedback; handling difficult people; managing emotions; high emotional intelligence; identifying nonverbal cues; recognizing differences; understanding different viewpoints; good interpersonal skills; ability to recognize problems; good self-control; and ability to embrace different opinions.

Creative problem solving skills are inevitable in conflict resolution. Understanding and communication are good, but do not help much if solution is not found for the underlying problem, whatever that problem may be. Conflict often happens because no one can come up with a workable solution, so resolving the conflict depends on creating a solution. That makes problem-solving an in- demand skill for counsellors. Examples of problem-solving skills in the workplace include conflict analysis, brainstorming solutions, collaborating, verbal communication, convening meetings, creativity, decision making, designating sanctions, nonverbal communication, problem solving, sense of humour, goal integration and monitoring compliance.

Developing these skills can help counsellors and administrators in tertiary educational institutions effectively resolve conflicts, improve relationships and achieve employee performance. The more employees' perceived organizational injustice and unfairness as arising from the poor management of conflict in the work place, the more they reciprocate by exhibiting negative attitude to work. These negative attitudes are not without consequences on staff morale and performance. This study therefore focused on counselling and alternative conflict resolution skills in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State

Purpose of the Study

The study focused on counselling and alternative conflict resolution skills in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study:

1. To assess the extent to which academic staff in three tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State utilize counselling skills for conflict resolution.
2. To evaluate the perceived efficacy of counselling skills for conflict resolution among academic staff in these institutions.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the extent of utilization of counselling skills by academic staff as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State?
2. How effective are counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy by academic staff in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female academic staff on the utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary

educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State.

2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female academic staff on the efficacy of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

This study focused on counselling as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. The survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised academic staff of three tertiary educational institutions: Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden, 164 academic staff; Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit, 159 academic staff; and Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, 128 academic staff. This gave a total population of 451 academic staff. The proportional sampling technique was used in drawing a sample size of 126 respondents representing 28% of the population using the convenience sampling procedure. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane's formula and proportional sampling technique. The Taro Yamane's formula is stated as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Out of a total of 135 questionnaire distributed, 128 were properly completed giving a response rate of 94.82%. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated for the study. Data collection was done using a researcher-developed instrument: 'Counselling as Alternative Conflict Resolution Strategy in Tertiary Educational Institutions' (CACRSTEI) Questionnaire. The instrument made up of two parts A and B, consisted of 20 items. Part A solicited demographic information from the respondents while part B made up of sections 1 and 2 contained the questionnaire items. The items were structured on a four-point rating scale with Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1 point. The instrument was duly validated by two experts in guidance and counselling using content validation technique. The instrument was trial tested with a pilot sample size of 20 academic staff. The overall reliability yielded 0.91 using Cronbach alpha coefficient Method. This applies to the entire scale. The research questions were answered using weighted mean, while the null hypotheses were tested using independent t-test at 0.05 level of significance, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v25).

The consent of the respondents was sought and obtained before administering the questionnaire for data collection. Respondents were made aware of their freedom to participate or withdraw from the study at any point in time, if need arose. The participants were assured of confidentiality and granted the right to anonymity where requested. Their privacies and persons were respected. The participants were assured of non-concealment of any information pertaining to the research to enhance their participation. The researcher presented himself honestly to the

participant. The researcher ensured that the data collection procedure did not cause any physical or emotional harm to the participants; does not intentionally or dishonestly distort any information given by the respondent.

Data Analysis and Results

The data collected were analyzed using weighted means and independent t-test.

Research Question 1

What is the extent of utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: *Weighted means of the extent of utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State*

S/N	**Utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy**	**Means**		**Cluster Means**	*Cut off point = 2.5*
		Male Academic Staff(n=71)	**Female Academic Staff (n=55)**		
1.	Communication skills	3.1	3.2	3.15	
2.	Interpersonal skills	3.2	3.1	3.15	
3.	Negotiation skills	2.9	2.8	2.85	
4.	Leadership skills	3.0	2.9	2.95	
5.	Emotional intelligence	2.8	2.8	2.8	
6.	Empathy	2.9	3.0	2.95	
7.	Creative problem solving	2.7	2.8	2.75	
Average Means		**2.94**	**2.94**	**2.94**	

Table 1 presents The mean scores of male and female academic staff on the extent of utilization of counselling as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. Both the individual item mean scores and the cluster means of the two groups of academic staff (male and female) are above the cut off point of 2.5. By implication, all the identified counselling skills are utilized as alternative conflict resolution strategy by lecturers in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female academic staff on the utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. Independent t-test analysis was employed in testing the hypotheses.

Table 2: *Independent t-test analysis of the responses of male and female academic staff on the utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational*

institutions in Akwa Ibom State

S/N	Utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy	Means		t-value	Remarks
		Male Academic Staff (n=71)	Female Academic Staff (n=55)		
1.	Communication skills	3.1	3.2	1.41	NS
2.	Interpersonal skills	3.2	3.1	1.37	NS
3.	Negotiation skills	2.9	2.8	1.32	NS
4.	Leadership skills	3.0	2.9	1.26	NS
5.	Emotional intelligence	2.8	2.8	1.25	NS
6.	Empathy	2.9	3.0	1.23	NS
7.	Creative problem solving	2.7	2.8	1.35	NS

df = 124; t-crit. = 1.96;
NS = Not Significant

Table 2 indicates no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female academic staff on the utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. On the whole, the calculated t-values are less than the critical t-value of 1.96, leading to the retention of the null hypothesis. This implies that all the identified counselling skills are utilized as alternative conflict resolution strategyby the academic staff in resolving conflict in tertiary educational institutions in the state. This is further portrayed in the magnitude of the mean scores which are higher than the cut off point of 2.5 in both groups.

Research Question 2

How effective are counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 3: *Weighted means of the effectiveness of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State*

S/N	Effectiveness of counselling	Means

	skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy	Male Academic Staff (n=71)	Female Academic Staff (n=55)	Cluster Means
1.	Communication skills	3.5	3.4	3.45
2.	Interpersonal skills	3.3	3.2	3.25
3.	Negotiation skills	3.1	3.0	3.05
4.	Leadership skills	3.2	3.1	3.15
5.	Emotional intelligence	3.3	3.1	3.2
6.	Empathy	3.2	3.2	3.2
7.	Creative problem solving	3.4	3.3	3.35
Average Means		**3.29**	**3.19**	**3.24**

Cut off point = 2.5

Table 3 presents the mean scores of male and female academic staff on the effectiveness of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. Both the individual item mean scores and the cluster means of the two groups of academic staff (male and female) are above the cut off point of 2.5. By implication, all the identified counselling skills are effective as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female academic staff on the efficacy of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State.

Independent t-test analysis was employed in testing the hypotheses.

Table 4: *Independent t-test analysis of the responses of male and female academic staff on the efficacy of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State.*

S/N	Effectiveness of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy	Means		t-value	Remarks
		Male Academic Staff (n=71)	Female Academic Staff (n=55)		
1.	Communication skills	3.5	3.4	1.84	NS
2.	Interpersonal skills	3.3	3.2	1.86	NS
3.	Negotiation skills	3.1	3.0	1.72	NS
4.	Leadership skills	3.2	3.1	1.68	NS
5.	Emotional intelligence	3.3	3.1	1.66	NS
6.	Empathy	3.2	3.2	1.64	NS
7.	Creative problem solving	3.4	3.3	1.61	NS

df = 124; t-crit. = 1.96;
NS = Not Significant

Table 4 indicates no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female academic staff on the efficacy of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. On the whole, the calculated t-values are less than the critical t-value of 1.96, leading to the retention of the null hypothesis. By implication, both the male and female academic staff agreed on the effectiveness of all the identified counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in the state. This is further portrayed in the magnitude of the mean scores which are greater than the cut off point of 2.5 in both groups.

Discussion of Findings

Data analysis in hypothesis one revealed no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female academic staff on the utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. By implication, all the identified counselling skills are utilized as alternative conflict resolution strategy by the academic staff in resolving conflict in tertiary educational institutions in the state. This confirms the answer to research question one. The finding is collaborated by Kilag, et al. (2024) and Valente & Lourenco (2020). These scholars found out in their separate studies that administrators and teachers often employ counselling skills such as communication skills, leadership skills, mediation, negotiation, collaboration and emotional intelligence in resolving conflict in their institutions. As observed by Pearce (2019), counselling skills are akin to conflict resolution skills and can be more effective in conflict resolution if carefully utilized. This finding indicates the

preference on utilization of counselling skills by academic staff in conflict resolution in their service units as alternative conflict resolution strategy.

Data analysis in hypothesis two indicated no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female academic staff on the efficacy of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. This implies that both the male and female academic staff agreed on the effectiveness of all the identified counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions in the state.This confirms the answer to research question two. This finding is in line with Adham (2023) who investigated the efficacy of counselling skills such as active listening, negotiation, and collaboration in addressing conflicts constructively. The scholar found out that counselling skills were effective in conflict resolution. Effective conflict resolution, as noted by the Adham (2023) enhances team cohesion, communication and productivity, while unresolved conflicts may lead to decreased morale and performance. Understanding conflict dynamics and employing appropriate resolution skills are critical for fostering positive team outcomes. Jordan et al. (2021) explored how individuals with higher EI levels exhibit better conflict management skills, including empathy, self-awareness and impulse control, leading to more constructive resolutions. The author found out that effective emotion regulation within teams contributes to enhanced problem-solving processes, communication and decision-making. Conversely, poor emotional management may escalate conflicts and hinder productivity. Therefore, understanding the interplay between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution is pivotal for promoting positive team dynamics and optimizing performance outcomes in problem-solving contexts. The finding of this study portrays the importance of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in tertiary educational institutions. Skilled counsellors resolved conflicts during the counseling process without resorting to the established conflict resolution strategy.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that counselling skills are employed and are effective as alternative conflict resolution strategy in resolving conflicts in tertiary educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. Counsellors in tertiary educational institutions should emphasize and encourage staff in positions of authority on the utilization of counselling skills as alternative conflict resolution strategy in the institutions through policy briefs, staff meetings, or institutional advocacy.
2. The relevant authorities in the institutions should regularly organize training through conferences and workshops for academic staff on the utilization of counselling skills in

conflict resolution in their various departments. This should be done biannually.

3. Administrators in the institutions should encourage open and honest communication among

employees. Create a culture where employees feel safe discussing concerns and conflicts without fear of retaliation. Besides, institutional grievance handling policies are recommended.

4. Departments should encourage early intervention by addressing conflicts as soon as they arise rather than allowing them to escalate. Early intervention can prevent issues from becoming more significant problems. Formal mediation or counselling units within departments should be involved.
5. School authority should consider using conflict management software or tools to streamline the reporting and resolution process. These tools can help track and manage conflicts more efficiently. However, feasibility assessment should be carried out prior to the implementation of this recommendation.

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HARNESSING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR EFFECTIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN COUNSELLING PRACTICE: TOWARDS AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

The research study investigates how schools in Nigeria use Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology for their counselling services to improve their ability to resolve conflicts. Nigerian educational institutions currently face a critical shortage of professional counsellors with practitioner-to-student ratios often exceeding 1:1,000. The "counselling gap" requires innovative solutions but the implementation of AI-driven tools creates important ethical and operational difficulties for the education system. Through a thematic analysis of current literature and professional standards the study identifies three primary findings which demonstrate that AI increases service accessibility in rural areas while the Nigerian cultural values regulatory framework needs immediate development and "human-in-the-loop" systems must remain operational to test these boundaries. The research proposes a phased implementation approach which begins with capacity building and advances toward national policy development as its methodology for increasingly developing the field. The research proposes a hybrid model which uses AI technology to enhance human empathy while preserving student privacy and professional accountability through technological progress.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; counselling; dispute resolution; ethics; Nigerian context.

Introduction

Nigerian school counselling systems currently experience a critical development phase which establishes professional standards in response to increasing student mental health needs (Adeniyi, 2018). The National Policy on Education requires all schools to deliver complete guidance and counselling services (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), yet the country experiences inconsistent

service delivery which maintains traditional crisis management methods instead of establishing

proactive dispute resolution systems. The main challenge arises from the extreme shortage of staff because professional guidance standards recommend staffing ratios between 1:250 and 1:500 while present research shows that actual ratios in most public schools exceed 1:1,000 and many rural schools lack dedicated counsellors (Olayinka & Loto, 2020). The critical state of student mental health in Nigeria is further evidenced by Ogunleye and Adebayo (2022), who identified a significant correlation between psychological well-being and academic performance among secondary school students, highlighting the urgent need for accessible support systems. The "counselling gap" leads to an escalation of disputes because people do not address conflicts until they become major disciplinary issues. The position paper establishes that Artificial Intelligence (AI) should support Nigerian school counsellors through a regulated human-in-the-loop system which protects students' privacy and reduces algorithmic bias while enhancing counselling skills.

The Role of Counselling in Dispute Resolution and Student Well-being

The school counselling system provides structured methods which develop interpersonal relationships to help students resolve conflicts. School counsellors facilitate student understanding through their role as mediators who solve peer disputes while delivering psychosocial services and guiding students and their families to mental health resources and parental support services and academic accommodations. The activities help students achieve their academic, social, and career goals through reduction of psychological damage which would result from unresolved disputes. Scientific studies and policy documents view counselling as an essential element of high-quality education which should be available in all schools (Egbo, 2020).

Challenges and Future Directions

Feasibility and infrastructure: Many Nigerian schools—especially in rural and underserved districts—face unreliable electricity, limited internet connectivity, and a shortage of basic hardware. The current situation prevents organisations from using online AI services because they require constant internet connections. The implementation of the system needs to include both offline-capable designs and local data caching which uses strong encryption and realistic cost estimation for hardware and maintenance expenses (Okoli & Okechukwu, 2021).

Cultural and ethical fit: The societal stigma which exists about mental health matters together with cultural distress expressions and local mentorship practices determine people's willingness to seek help and their acceptance of digital health solutions. The system requires both cultural adaptation and linguistic validation for its AI tools while implementation needs to involve community participation and stigma reduction activities to succeed at ethical compliance (Oduh, 2020; Olayinka & Loto, 2020).

Governance, data sovereignty, and accountability: AI systems create major governance issues because they determine the storage locations of data and the control rights over model updates and data access. International frameworks (e.g., GDPR) and policy guidance on AI ethics stress

transparency, auditability, and human oversight; Nigerian regulatory development should adapt

these principles to local realities and ensure the national data-protection authority is involved in any school-level rollout.

Actionable Directions for Policymakers:

- ♦ Mandate phased minimum counsellor-to-student targets. Set a realistic national roadmap (e.g., aim for 1:500 within five years), with clear funding lines and monitoring by the Ministry of Education.
- ♦ Accredit and audit AI counselling tools. Create a certification pathway—led by professional bodies and the national data-protection authority—for bias testing, privacy compliance, and human-in-the-loop guarantees prior to deployment. (Suggested agencies: Ministry of Education, APROCON, national data-protection authority.)
- ♦ Modernize counsellor training. Update curricula to include digital literacy, AI ethics, and supervision of algorithmic tools in pre-service and in-service programmes.
- ♦ Invest in secure, offline-capable infrastructure. Fund hardware, reliable power/backups, and school-level encryption standards before scaling AI pilots.
- ♦ Fund stigma-reduction and community engagement. Run national and school-level campaigns to increase mental health literacy and acceptability of hybrid digital services.

Exploring AI Applications in Learning and Counselling

Globally, the integration of AI in educational settings is viewed as a transformative shift capable of addressing systemic inefficiencies and providing personalised support at scale (Baker & Smith, 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; Luckin et al., 2018). These technologies offer a pathway to bridge the gap between resource scarcity and student needs. AI applications in education and counselling use adaptive learning systems together with conversational agents to provide personalized learning experiences. The intelligent tutoring system IBM Watson Tutor uses learner analytics to create customized learning experiences which result in better educational outcomes according to Smith and Lee 2021. The mental health field shows that randomized studies demonstrate that Woebot conversational agents reduce users' self-reported depressive and anxiety symptoms during the first few months after treatment (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). Research studies show that AI chatbots function as beneficial tools which help people control their emotions while decreasing their psychological suffering (Hoermann et al. 2020).

The findings demonstrate that AI technology enables educational and counselling services to deliver instant scalable intervention solutions. Western datasets serve as the primary training resource for most commercial systems. The ability to transfer training results from Western datasets to Nigerian youth training programmes lacks verification due to massive variations in cultural norms and linguistic expressions of distress and conflict dynamics across different contexts. The implementation of educational programmes in Nigerian schools requires both local validation studies and design modifications which match local cultural practices.

Global Trends in AI for Counselling and Dispute Resolution

The mental health field has expanded its consumer-oriented AI tools since 2017 because of improved natural language processing and mobile application development capabilities (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). Research on conversational agents shows that they produce short-term emotional distress reductions while AI-assisted mediation systems use generative technology to create conflict summaries and devise settlement paths and facilitate negotiation preparation activities (Shonk, 2025). Counselling professionals need hybrid models which use AI technology to enhance their existing services.

The regulatory system has undergone changes. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) establishes stringent rules which govern both automated decision processes and the handling of confidential health information (Voigt & Von dem Bussche 2017). The United States and United Kingdom have developed policy documents which require AI health services to maintain transparency while organisations must work to eliminate biases because human monitors need to control all AI systems (FTC, 2021; CDEI, 2020). The global regulatory system creates an uneven distribution of regulatory frameworks while scholars have yet to investigate how governance models operate in Global South countries. The development of research needs to study fighting data protection regimes with ethical standards in environments which combine diverse cultural elements with limited resources (Nigeria).

Opportunities of AI in Nigerian Counselling Practice

AI technology offers multiple advantages which improve counselling services and dispute resolution processes in Nigeria.

- Accessibility: Remote areas without professional counsellors can access counselling services through AI platforms which eliminate transportation, stigma, and professional shortages as access obstacles. For example, AI-assisted frameworks have been proposed to improve the reach of mental health services in Nigerian schools where human practitioners are scarce (Obi et al., 2022).
- Efficiency: The process of administrative task automation enables human counsellors to concentrate on delivering more intensive therapy sessions instead of managing scheduling and reminder tasks and record documentation. The research shows that organisations which reduce administrative work improve their capability to deliver student-centred educational services at appropriate times (Adewale & Yusuf, 2019).
- Real-Time Support: AI tools provide users with 24/7 access to de-escalation support which they can access whenever emergencies occur. Modern applications like mental health chatbots provide a safe immediate space for students to express concerns and receive responses based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) principles (Shum et al., 2022).
- Data Analytics: AI systems can handle massive data sets to recognize behavioural trends and forecast potential conflict situations and propose prevention strategies. AI technology

provides educational institutions with tools which help them identify student behavioural trends and forecast academic performance problems to deliver timely educational support (Adegbite & Yusuf, 2021).

- Reduced Cost: The use of digital platforms makes counselling services more affordable across different economic levels thus increasing their availability to people from various socio-economic backgrounds. The current resource limitations in Nigerian rural schools make it hard to implement evidence-based interventions which treat health problems (Ajiboye & Bakare, 2019).

Ethical and Professional Considerations

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in counselling practice for dispute resolution provides substantial advantages but creates numerous ethical and professional dilemmas which require resolution to ensure student protection. The following thematic areas outline the primary considerations for responsible AI integration:

1. Privacy and Data Security

Protecting sensitive client information is the paramount ethical obligation in any counselling relationship. AI systems require vast amounts of data to function effectively which increases the risk of unauthorized access or data breaches. The essential requirement for student data confidentiality and security establishes the trust foundation which enables successful dispute resolution.

2. Consent and Transparency (Informed Consent)

It is ethically non-negotiable that clients are fully informed when interacting with an AI system. Informed consent in this digital context must be expanded to explicitly disclose:

- ♦ The Nature of the Interaction: Users must be clearly told they are communicating with an automated system rather than a human professional.
- ♦ System Limitations: The specific boundaries of what the AI can and cannot do in a dispute resolution context must be articulated.
- ♦ Data Management: Institutions must disclose where data is stored, how long it is kept, and who has access to it.
- ♦ Opt-out Mechanisms: Students must be provided with a clear, accessible pathway to decline AI-driven support in favour of traditional human-led counselling without any negative repercussions.

3. Algorithmic Bias and Fairness

Algorithmic Bias and Fairness AI algorithms are only as objective as the data used to train them. The systems can create stereotypes which affect minority perspectives in Nigeria when they

use data that does not represent the population or contains historical biases. Dispute resolution

tools need to maintain cultural sensitivity while providing equal access to all student demographic groups.

4. Therapeutic Limitations and Human Oversight

Therapeutic Limitations and Human Oversight AI lack the emotional depth nuanced understanding and genuine empathy that human counsellors bring to complex interpersonal conflicts. The AI system needs professional judgement to process information which requires human abilities. The continuous human oversight process needs to handle high-stakes disputes and situations where the AI system cannot identify important cultural and emotional information.

5. Accountability and Liability

Accountability and Liability The system makes it challenging to identify responsible parties when the AI system provides wrong mediation advice or misclassifies a student's level of risk. The legal responsibility determination process requires specific definitions which identify whether the software developer or supervising counsellor or educational institution bear the responsibility for their actions. Establishing these lines of accountability is vital for maintaining professional standards and institutional integrity.

Recommendation for Professional Guidelines

To navigate these ethical complexities, it is recommended that professional counselling bodies in Nigeria, such as the Association of Professional Counsellors of Nigeria (APROCON), take a proactive leadership role. These bodies should craft formal position statements and comprehensive technical standards specifically for digital counselling tools. Such guidelines would provide a much-needed regulatory roadmap for practitioners and ensure that AI adoption aligns with Nigerian ethical values and professional requirements.

Challenges in Implementing AI in Nigerian Context

The transition from traditional, advice-based counselling models to AI-integrated systems in Nigeria is obstructed by a complex array of systemic and socio-cultural barriers .

Technical and Infrastructure Barriers

The digital divide remains a primary obstacle to the equitable adoption of AI in education. Many Nigerian schools, particularly in rural and underserved districts, suffer from unreliable power supplies and limited internet connectivity. Furthermore, the lack of infrastructure and expertise in Nigeria poses significant challenges to implementing AI in counselling practice (Okoli & Okechukwu, 2021).

Social and Cultural Barriers

Deep-seated cultural perceptions regarding mental health and technology present significant

hurdles. There is often a prevailing stigma surrounding the act of seeking professional help for

psychological or interpersonal disputes (Oduh, 2020). Additionally, cultural variables and traditional mentorship models may conflict with digitized solutions (Olayinka & Loto, 2020).

Skills Gaps and Digital Literacy

A critical challenge is the limited training of current practitioners, which often results in an inadequate understanding of complex mental health issues (Ibrahim, 2019). Without comprehensive capacity-building initiatives and training on AI tools and digital ethics, counsellors may struggle to engage with new technologies.

Procurement and Funding Realities

The successful deployment of AI tools is heavily dependent on sustainable funding, yet many Nigerian schools currently face significant funding shortages. Establishing clear guidelines and national policies is necessary to manage how these tools are procured and utilized across the educational sector.

Impact on Student Outcomes: An Empirical Note

While this paper asserts that ineffective counselling services contribute to high dropout rates and poor academic performance (Ajiboye & Bakare, 2019), it is important to note that these consequences are often identified as correlational in a broader systemic context. While AI-enhanced counselling aims to improve student support, its direct causal impact on these outcomes requires further empirical validation within the Nigerian landscape.

Suggestions

To ensure the responsible and effective integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the Nigerian counselling landscape, the following actionable measures are recommended, categorized by their implementation timeline and impact feasibility:

Short-Term Recommendations (0–12 Months)

- Capacity Building (Professional Bodies & Universities): Launch a 12-month pilot training programme targeted at 500 school counsellors focusing on AI literacy, digital ethics, and hybrid counselling models. Success should be measured through standardized pre- and post-training evaluations to ensure a significant increase in technical proficiency.
- Public Engagement (Ministry of Education & NGOs): Launch national awareness campaigns to demystify AI technology and promote its responsible use among students, parents, and educators. Indicators of success include increased participation rates in digital mental health forums and a measurable reduction in stigma surrounding technology-assisted counselling.

Medium-Term Recommendations (1–3 Years)

- Policy Development (Ministry of Education & APROCON): Within 18 months, formalize and issue national guidelines that mandate specific informed consent templates, define minimum

data-security requirements, and clarify professional oversight responsibilities for AI-driven

tools.

- Research and Innovation (Local Tech Hubs & Academic Institutions): Incentivize the local development of culturally relevant AI tools tailored to Nigerian languages, indigenous values, and specific communal conflict dynamics. This ensures that dispute resolution algorithms are grounded in the socio-cultural realities of the Nigerian student population.

Long-Term Recommendations (3–5+ Years)

- Infrastructure Investment (Federal Government & International Donors): Prioritize the expansion of stable digital infrastructure, aiming to provide reliable internet connectivity and hardware to 60% of rural and underserved schools within 3 to 5 years. This systemic improvement is essential to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to AI-enhanced counselling services across all regions

Conclusion

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Nigerian school counselling services offers a transformative opportunity to revolutionize student support, enhance accessibility, and streamline complex dispute resolution processes. While AI-powered tools, including chatbots, mental health applications, and predictive analytics, can identify at-risk students and bridge critical gaps in underserved areas, their successful implementation cannot be left to chance.

Ultimately, this paper argues that while AI can significantly expand the reach and responsiveness of school counselling in Nigeria, its benefits will only be realized under a strictly regulated hybrid approach that preserves human oversight, secures sensitive student data, and ensures deep cultural relevance. The current evidence suggests that a reactive or unmonitored adoption risks exacerbating digital inequalities and compromising ethical standards. Therefore, this paper advocates for a cautious, incremental strategy i.e. pilot, evaluate, and regulate, to ensure that technology serves to augment rather than replace essential human care. By adopting this comprehensive and inclusive strategy, Nigerian educational institutions can responsibly harness the power of AI to foster more sustainable, effective, and conflict-competent learning environments.

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EDUCATION STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN EPE, LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

In this study, students studying business education at tertiary institutions in Epe, Lagos State, had their academic success predicted by digitalization. The design of the survey was cross-sectional. Using Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample of 333 respondents was chosen via proportionate stratified random sampling from the population of 2,000 students. A standardized questionnaire measuring the integration of digital tools, frequency of digital usage, digital competence, internet accessibility, and academic performance was used to gather data. Cronbach's alpha coefficients showed satisfactory reliability, ranging from 0.74 to 0.87. Multiple linear regression and descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the data at a significance level of 0.05. The results showed that a considerable percentage of the variance in academic achievement was explained by the combination of digitization variables (R2 = 0.61, p <.05). The best predictor was found to be digital competency. The report suggests that business education curriculum incorporate structured digital literacy.

Keywords: Digitization, academic performance, business education, Counselling.

Introduction

Digital technology's explosive growth has changed how education is delivered in post secondary institutions around the world. Digitization has changed student participation, instructional strategies, and evaluation procedures in business education. Academic settings are progressively incorporating tools like online assessment platforms, digital collaboration platforms, virtual classrooms, and learning management systems. The degree to which digitization results in quantifiable gains in academic achievement is still up for debate, notwithstanding these developments. In Nigeria, advancements in learning outcomes have not always kept pace with the growth of digital infrastructure. There are still differences in organized use, educational

integration, and digital competency. The majority of current research concentrates on either

digital literacy or technology adoption separately, with little empirical attention paid to their combined predictive impact on business education students' academic performance.

Nigeria is rapidly turning digital, just like many other African countries, as technology is becoming an essential part of contemporary education as a result of the growing use of digital technologies in educational institutions, which is progressively changing traditional teaching and learning methods (Ololube, 2016). However, Nigeria faces peculiar problems that stand in the way of technological growth in its learning environments, compared to wealthier nations where educational digitization is more highly integrated. According to Ogundile and Ayeni (2022), these difficulties include disparity in access to digital infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, and a lack of technological competence among teachers and pupils. These obstacles cause educational technology to be implemented unequally, which lowers the quality and inclusivity of the digital learning opportunities that students have access to.

A considerable digital gap exists between Nigerian urban and rural schools, according to a study by Alabi and Onyenanu (2021). Rural students still face challenges due to insufficient infrastructure, while students in urban areas have more access to digital resources. This difference highlights how prompt actions are needed to close the digital gap, especially given the modern workforce's increasing requirement for technology proficiency (Ekong & Ekong, 2020).

Information technology was first primarily concerned with computer-based applications, but it has now broadened to encompass a variety of digital tools, including interactive multimedia platforms, online learning management systems, and mobile computing devices. These developments improve the administration of educational data as well as the distribution of information (Chinedu-Eze & Bello, 2018). In order to encourage student participation and cultivate critical thinking abilities, Nigerian educators are consequently incorporating digital tools into their lesson plans more frequently (Adeoye & Tomei, 2014).

Students can use a variety of digital tools and applications to learn as long as they have access to a computer and the internet. Lectures enhanced with multimedia like music and movies incorporated into podcasts are increasingly being recorded and made accessible for download so that students can examine the material whenever it's convenient for them. Multimedia Simulations of Learning Practices have shown promise in addressing the problem of teacher isolation (Ratheeswari, 2018). With the help of these tools, teachers can present lessons in an interactive way. For instance, students can use their fingers to access content on an interactive whiteboard. Teachers only need to tap symbols on the screen to start video segments that break down difficult ideas.

Another important factor in language learning is information and communication technology, or ICT. It aids in the growth of auditory language abilities, especially those related to pronunciation issues that non-native speakers frequently encounter. Furthermore, by translating

speech into readable text, transcription systems help deaf student’s better follow and understand

lectures.

Digitization has enhanced institutional accountability and transparency beyond teaching, especially in financial management. Innovative learning environments like virtual universities, smart universities, digital universities, e-universities, agile universities, and the more general idea of University 4.0 have been sparked by the development of digital education. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, impacted more than 287 million primary school students in India.

Nonetheless, during the 2019–2020 and succeeding semesters, online teaching and learning resources preserved academic continuity (Marta, Coscelluela, & Vazquez, 2021).

It supports the development of auditory language skills, particularly those pertaining to pronunciation problems that non-native speakers commonly face. Additionally, transcription devices assist deaf students in following and comprehending lectures by converting spoken words into legible text. Beyond education, digitization has improved institutional accountability and transparency, particularly in the area of financial administration. The growth of digital education has spurred the creation of innovative learning environments such as virtual universities, smart universities, digital universities, e-universities, agile universities, and the broader concept of University 4.0. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic affected over 287 million Indian primary school pupils. However, online teaching and learning materials maintained academic continuity throughout the 2019–2020 and subsequent semesters (Marta, Coscelluela, & Vazquez, 2021).

One of the biggest obstacles to the digitization of higher education is still data security. Even though a lot of study has been done on the use of digital technologies in education, the majority of these studies concentrate on industrialized nations since they have better institutional resources and access to technology. Research on the effects of digitization in Nigeria, however, is still in its infancy. Nonetheless, research indicates that by creating adaptable, dynamic learning environments, digital tools can greatly improve students' educational experiences (UNESCO, 2021). Technology, for example, makes it possible to implement hybrid learning models that accommodate different learning preferences, increase accessibility, and improve students' digital literacy, which is becoming a more and more important ability in the modern workforce (Agbatogun, 2020).

This study examined the impact of technological change on the academic performance of Business Education students in Epe Local Government while taking these contextual factors into account. The study wanted to demonstrate the benefits and difficulties brought about by digitalization in Nigeria's educational system by extensively examining the impact of digital innovation on student results. In the end, the study offers recommendations based on data to guide future strategies for the successful incorporation of technology in educational settings.

The Paradigm of Educational Digitization:

The deliberate incorporation of cutting-edge technology systems, like interactive software, web-based learning platforms, and extensive digital repositories into pedagogical, instructional,

and administrative procedures is known as educational digitization. By utilizing contemporary

technological advancements to improve instructional delivery and overall educational outcomes, this revolutionary movement reinterprets traditional educational methods. In order to create deeply engaging and participatory learning environment that actively involves students and provides novel access to vast amounts of knowledge, it goes beyond the mere use of digital tools (OECD, 2015).

Academic Performance in the Business Education Context

Assessment, scores and more general learning objectives are some examples of the quantitative data that are commonly used to assess academic performance. However, scholarly excellence in business education goes beyond theoretical knowledge. It displays the capacity to use managerial and commercial ideas in practical work settings. This discipline entails a broad range of capabilities, from the development of practical skills in strategic decision-making, problem-solving and critical analysis in corporate settings to the proficiency of basic subjects like financial accounting, organizational management, marketing and economics.

In business education, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to evaluate student performance. Cumulative grade point averages (CGPAs), scores on systematic tests, and performance on assignments as well as tests are examples of quantitative methods that evaluate students' understanding of fundamental business ideas and capacity for analytical reasoning (OECD, 2015). However, qualitative assessment techniques like case studies, project-based assignments, business simulations, and oral presentations provide more in-depth understanding of students' ability to integrate knowledge and apply it to real-world, contextualized situations (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

Influencing Factors on Academic Performance in Business Education

Student performance in business education is influenced by a number of factors. Educational approach is one of the most important of these and it is becoming more widely acknowledged that creative teaching methods, such as distance learning and participatory training models, can increase student engagement and encourage a better understanding of difficult business topics. These methods promote collaborative learning and active engagement, which leads to more fulfilling educational experiences and better academic results (Voogt & Knezek, 2008).

Another important factor is the availability of resources. Academic performance and innovation are promoted by having access to modern teaching resources, innovative technology, and well-equipped classrooms. The extent to which technology is incorporated into the curriculum is especially key in the current digital learning environment. In addition to improving personalization and interaction, digital technologies give instant feedback, which helps students spot and close learning gaps fast. Because digital technologies facilitate both theoretical comprehension and real-world application in business education, institutions that properly incorporate them typically report higher levels of academic performance (OECD, 2015).

In addition, the educational environment is greatly shaped by the intense discourses of

teaching methods, resource availability, and technological incorporation, which can either help or hurt students' academic performance. For example, although online tools and digital platforms have the potential to transform education, their efficacy is mostly dependent on how digitally literate teachers and students are. The full potential of these technologies might remain suppressed in the absence of proper training and institutional support, which would lead to digital inequalities and unequal learning outcomes (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

Integration of Digital Tools in Business Education

The objective of the unique academic subject of business education is to give students the conceptual framework and real-life skills they need to succeed in a variety of business-related fields, such as marketing, finance, management, and entrepreneurship. Being a multidisciplinary field, it incorporates basic topics like economics, management, marketing, and accounting while placing a strong emphasis on practical application through participatory training methods that mirror current business issues.

The incorporation of digital tools into business education has become a crucial component of present-day syllabus in response to the swift digitization of the global corporate environment. It is becoming more and more important for academic programs to prepare students for the technical needs of the changing workplace as digital transformation continues to redefine organizational operations.

Computerized marketing apps, virtual business simulations, data analytics tools, and online learning platforms are now compulsory components of educational methods.

In addition to facilitating individualized and interactive learning, these tools help students acquire the critical digital skills needed in the data-driven, tech-driven business world of today (Ifenthaler & Yau, 2020). In order to give students real experience with tools that are often used in the field, digital marketing courses, for example, frequently incorporate exercises in social media analytics, search engine optimization (SEO), and digital advertising. The strategic importance of digital media in contemporary marketing and communication is further supported by this real-life experience.

Similarly, using business simulation software gives students the chance to practice making decisions in a safe, virtual environment. By letting students examine market dynamics, test business plans, and see the results of their choices in real time, these simulations help close the gap between academic understanding and real-life application. Business education programs are better equipped to produce graduates who are not just mentally strong but also technologically proficient and prepared for the workforce thanks to these deeply engaging learning resources.

Concept of Digitization in Education

The deliberate incorporation of digital technologies such as interactive software, virtual

simulations, online learning platforms, and digital resources into teaching, learning, and

administrative procedures is known as "digitization" in education. By creating dynamic, adaptable, and customized learning environments, this shift redefines the educational experience and goes beyond the simple digitization of content. Traditional instructional approaches are changing to prioritize learner involvement, real-time feedback, and increased accessibility as educational institutions around the world adopt new technologies (Selwyn, 2016).

Digitization has been demonstrated to greatly improve student learning experiences and academic results in the setting of business education. For example, Eebo and Umoru (2019) looked into how project-based learning affected the academic achievement of Business Education students in Principles of Accounting at South-West Nigerian universities. According to the study, students' comprehension and application of accounting principles were positively impacted by project-based learning strategies, which are frequently aided by digital resources for research, collaboration, and presentation. This promoted active learning.

The impact of e-learning technologies on undergraduate Business Education students at universities in Delta and Edo States was also investigated in a study referenced in Track2Training (2023). The results showed that efficient use of digital platforms and resources enhanced academic achievement because they encouraged self-paced learning and offered flexible access to a variety of educational materials.

Digital technology integration in business education is not without its difficulties, despite the possible advantages. Digital literacy, infrastructure, opposition to change, and context-specific barriers, especially those that impact urban regions like Epe, are the four basic categories into which these challenges typically fall.

The high expense of purchasing, maintaining, and updating digital technology, erratic power supply, and a lack of technical support are some of the difficulties. Urban institutions may have greater access to modern digital gadgets and high-speed internet, but these benefits are frequently dimmed by financial limitations and the rapid advancement of technology, which necessitates ongoing investment (Beetham, 2013).

One major obstacle to digital adoption is still resistance, especially from teachers who are more accustomed to traditional teaching methods. The adoption of digital advances may be delayed by this opposition, which is frequently worsened by institutional inaction. The potential of digital tools to improve learning outcomes may be limited if they are eventually implemented without sufficient training and support, as both educators and students may find it difficult to use them successfully (Chigona, 2013).

Even though infrastructure in urban settings like Epe is typically more advanced than in rural ones, specific issues still exist and call for focused initiatives. The changing role of counsellors is one of such intervention. In order to support students not just academically but also emotionally and morally, counselling services must broaden their reach and embrace bold, tech-informed

practices as a result of the move toward digital learning environments. Students' academic

performance and general well-being can be greatly enhanced by the successful integration of counselling into digital education systems.

There are not many studies that explicitly look at tertiary institutions in Epe, Lagos State, where initiatives for digital transformation are growing in a semi-urban academic setting. In order to close this gap, this study looks at how digitization affects business education students' academic performance at Yabatech's Epe Campus and what it means for counselling practices. The study's contributions include the use of a predictive regression framework, the provision of empirical data unique to business education, and useful advice for curriculum developers and institutional managers. This study attempts to offer evidence-based suggestions for improving academic results through both technology integration and student support services by examining the advantages, drawbacks, and contextual difficulties related to digital learning.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Digital Competence Theory serve as the study's pillars. Technology acceptance is determined by perceived utility and perceived ease of use, according to TAM. Technology adoption behaviours that impact academic results are reflected in the integration and frequency of use of digital technologies.

The theory of digital competency places emphasis on the abilities, know-how, and dispositions necessary for successful digital interaction. Technology access by itself does not ensure better performance; the educational benefits of using digital tools depend on one's ability to use them effectively. By taking into account both viewpoints, academic success is seen to be impacted by both user competency and digital integration, not only access.

Methodology

Research Design

The survey design used was cross-sectional, and both the population and the sample of 2,000 students from four academic levels studying business education made up the population. At a 5% precision level, 333 respondents were selected as the sample size using Yamane's (1967) formula.

Since maximum = 4 and the Minimum = 1, the midpoint is:

[\frac{4 + 1} {2} = 2.5]

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 → High/Positive and Mean < 2.50 → Low/Negative

Reliability and Validity:

Business education specialists validated the tool. Cronbach's alpha coefficients showed satisfactory reliability, ranging from 0.74 to 0.87.

Analysis of Data:

The characteristics of the respondents were summed up by descriptive statistics. At a significance threshold of 0.05, the predictive impact of digitization variables on academic

performance was investigated using multiple linear regression. The following assumptions were

examined: multi-collinearity (VIF < 5), homoscedasticity, normalcy, and linearity.

Sampling Technique:

To guarantee representation across academic levels, proportionate stratified random sampling was employed. The respondents were chosen by simple random sampling within each strata.

Results

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Proportionate Sample Allocation:

Academic Level	Population	Sample
Year I	500	83
Year II	550	92
Year III	480	80
Year IV	470	78
Total	2000	333

Instrumentation

A systematic questionnaire comprising four constructs, integration of digital tools, frequency of digital usage, digital competence, and internet accessibility, was used to gather data. Scale-based items were also used to measure academic performance. A four-point Likert scale, with Strongly Agree (4) and Strongly Disagree (1) as the extremes, was used to rate each item. In order to promote unambiguous answers and lessen central tendency bias, there was no neutral midway.

Research Questions/ Hypotheses:

To what extent does digital tools integration affect academic performance?

H_{01}: Digital tools integration has no significant effect on academic performance.
H_{11}: Digital tools integration has a significant effect on academic performance.

Does frequency of digital tool usage influence academic performance?

H_{02}: Frequency of digital tool usage does not significantly influence academic performance.
H_{12}: Frequency of digital tool usage significantly influences academic performance.

Does students' and lecturers' digital competence predict academic performance?

H_{03}: Students' digital competence does not significantly predict academic performance.
H_{13}: Students' digital competence significantly predicts academic performance.

Methodology

The study's sample size was established by applying the Yamane (1967) formula for finite

populations. With 2000 Business Education students in the population and a significance level of

0.05, 333 respondents made up the sample size. 360 copies of the questionnaire were sent out in order to accommodate for potential incomplete and non-response questions. This method guaranteed that every student had an equal chance of being included in the study, enhancing the representativeness of the findings. A self-structured questionnaire titled "Impact of Digitization on Business Education Students' Academic Performance (IDBESAP)" was developed as the primary instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was designed to capture information on the variables of interest. The data obtained were analyzed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the responses and provide an overview of the data. The criterion mean of 2.50 served as the benchmark for decision-making. Mean scores above 2.50 were interpreted as high levels of agreement, while mean scores below 2.50 indicated low levels.

The average of item responses within each concept was used to calculate composite scores. The aggregation of several items approximates interval-level measurement, allowing parametric statistical techniques like multiple regression to be used even if Likert-scale replies are ordinal.

Presentation and Analysis of Data According to Research Questions.

able 2: *Descriptive Statistics for Digitalization Variables*

Variable	N	Mean (M)	SD	Cronbach's α
Digital Tools Integration	333	3.78	0.62	0.81
Frequency of Digital Usage	333	3.65	0.71	0.76
Digital Competence	333	3.85	0.59	0.87
Internet Accessibility	333	3.40	0.82	0.74
Academic Performance	333	3.70	0.65	0.79

Table 3: *Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Academic Performance*

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p	VIF
Constant	0.85	0.42	—	2.02	0.045	—
Digital Tools Integration	0.28	0.09	0.28	3.21	0.002	1.42
Frequency of Usage	0.14	0.07	0.15	2.10	0.037	1.35
Digital Competence	0.41	0.08	0.41	4.85	0.000	1.38
Internet Accessibility	0.08	0.07	0.09	1.20	0.230	1.32

Model Summary: $R = 0.78$, $R^2 = 0.61$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.59$, $F(4, 328) = 128.47$, $p < 0.001$
Note: VIF values < 5 indicate no multicollinearity.

Discussion of Findings:

Digitization is a predictor of academic success. The greatest predictor was digital competence, emphasizing the value of skill development over merely having access to technology. While internet connectivity by itself could not predict results, the integration of digital tools and usage frequency also had a favorable impact on performance.

These results prove that when educational institutions bring technology into lessons or classes and set clear goals for what students should know, the students end up learning better. Training and the efficient use of technology in the classroom must be given top priority by educational institutions.

The results of the study, which included three main research questions, are as follows: according to research question1, to what extent are digital tools integrated into the Business Education curriculum of business education students of Yaba college of Technology students' Epe campus. The finding showed a moderate integration and this finding supports the framework of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003), highlighting the progressive adoption of educational technologies. This finding was in line with the argument put by, Ifenthaler and Yau, 2020 that these technologies not only facilitate interactive and personalized learning experiences but also provide students with the technical competencies required in today's technology-driven business environment.

The secondary research inquiry examined the influence of technological innovations on the scholarly achievement of Business Education students at Yaba College of Technology, Epe Campus. The empirical evidence demonstrates that the academic accomplishments of Business Education students experienced substantial enhancement through the systematic incorporation of

digital instruments within their curricular framework. These outcomes align with the research

conducted by Eebo and Umoru (2019), whose investigations indicated that project-oriented pedagogical approaches—frequently employing technological resources for investigative research and academic presentations—generated favorable effects on students' scholastic performance. Their study established that such methodological frameworks foster participatory learning experiences while enhancing students' comprehension of fundamental accounting concepts.

Furthermore, these findings correspond with the research documented in Track2Training (2023), which explored the ramifications of electronic learning technologies on undergraduate business education students across universities in Delta and Edo States. The investigation determined that the strategic implementation of digital learning platforms and technological educational resources resulted in enhanced academic achievements, as these technological systems enabled adaptable learning modalities while providing comprehensive access to diverse educational materials and resources.

The third research question which was on challenges and strategies of digital integration and the study agreed that despite all the benefits that it was not without several challenges that can hinder academic performance. These challenges can be broadly categorized into issues related to digital literacy, infrastructure, resistance to change, and context-specific challenges unique to urban settings like Epe. Challenges include the high cost of maintaining and upgrading digital equipment, inconsistent power supply, and limited technical support. Although urban institutions may have access to high-speed internet and modern devices, these benefits can be offset by budgetary constraints and the rapid pace of technological change, which require continuous investment to keep systems up-to-date (Beetham, 2013).

Conclusion:

The study concludes that digitization, particularly digital competence and tool integration, enhances academic performance among Business Education students. Recommendations include:

1. Structured digital literacy training within Business Education curricula.
2. Continuous professional development for lecturers in digital pedagogy.
3. Curriculum redesign to embed digital tools into teaching and assessment.
4. Investment in technology aligned with learning objectives rather than infrastructure alone.

The digitization has a very strong effect on academic performance of Business education students' in Yaba college of Education Epe Campus, this has transformed the academic environment, creating both opportunities and challenges that affect student performance. Counselling plays a critical role in helping students navigate these changes effectively.

Limitations:

1. The fact that this study focused on only Epe, Lagos State, it makes it hard to say whether the same results would be found in other areas.
2. Since the data was collected all at once, it is hard to prove that one thing actually caused

another.

3. When students rate their own academic success, they may not always be fully honest, which could affect the results.
4. Only four digitization variables were looked at; other elements, like the caliber of instruction, were left out.

Future Research:

1. Extend research to national samples or several campuses.
2. To prove causation, use experimental or longitudinal designs.
3. Use CGPA, or objective performance measurements.
4. Look at other predictors including student involvement and the efficacy of instruction.
5. Examine the effects of digital skill or motivation on moderation or mediation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is necessary for institutions to provide reliable internet access, functional devices, and other essential digital tools to support learning. Lecturers should undergo regular training programs to improve their digital literacy and teaching with technology.
2. Schools should integrate digital activities like webinars and online tutorials into their lesson plans in a structured manner and efforts should be made to boost digital skills among both students and lecturers to close the competence gap.
3. Counsellor' must prepare students for a digital workforce, guiding them in developing digital competencies aligned with future careers. Institutions should set up dedicated support systems to help resolve technical issues quickly and effectively.

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ADOPTION OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES BY COUNSELLORS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GOMBE STATE

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Abstract

This study sought to determine whether counsellors at secondary schools in Gombe State adopted intervention techniques to settle conflicts. Two research questions guided the investigation. The researcher established and analyzed two null hypotheses at the significance level of.05. The study adopted a census survey as its research design. There were 113 counsellors in the study's population (45 men and 68 women). Since the population could be controlled, no sampling was done. Data was gathered using a standardized questionnaire. Three experts from Gombe State University validated the instrument: two from the guidance and counselling department and one from the measurement and evaluation department of the department of mathematics and computer education (Measurement and Evaluation Unit). 92.9 percent of the instruments that were distributed were returned. The t-test was used to evaluate the hypotheses at the.05 level of significance, and the mean with standard deviation was used to answer the study questions. The data demonstrated that when it came to resolving disputes between secondary school students in Gombe State, counsellors did not use administrative or moral intervention strategies. Among other things, it was suggested that workshops and seminars be held to familiarize counsellors with administrative and ethical intervention methods. Both students' academic achievement and counsellors' productivity will increase as a result.

Keywords: Counsellor, Intervention, Techniques, Conflicts, Resolution.

Introduction

In the course of everyday contacts, every organization encounters conflict from time to time. Conflict is normal and unavoidable when individuals collaborate and share different ideas, worries, viewpoints, and objectives, claims Ezebuiro (2018). Conflict is a disagreement and misunderstanding between two parties concerning issues. According to Chukwunta (2014), conflict is a significant disagreement that causes hostility and opposition in interpersonal, group, and organizational relationships. When there are opposing or divergent viewpoints on a given topic, conflict arises (Bacal, 2014). This implies that a group or party, not just one person, must be involved in a fight. Conflict in the context of this study refers to a circumstance in which two or

more students seem to have incompatible interests, conflicts, or goals. Conflicting students are

described as arguing, splitting up, having difficulties, and fighting over anything. Miscommunication amongst students regarding their needs, ideas, views, goals, or values frequently leads to conflict.

Applying effective intervention strategies requires a thorough grasp of what conflict is and why it arises among students (Bacal, 2014). Conflicts appear to be common in Gombe State's secondary schools. At Government Girl's Secondary School Doma, for example, there have been documented instances of a breakdown in instruction and learning due to student misunderstandings brought on by some students' uncontrollable sexual desire (Uwakwe, 2020). It is impossible for students to think developmentally in a conflict-filled setting. Thus, it suggests that they will be deprived of the ability to create fresh concepts, projects, and inventions, which could lead to students consistently performing poorly on internal and external tests (Nnamdi, 2016). Therefore, guidance counsellors' help will significantly lower its prevalence. An educator who works in secondary schools to help all students develop their academic, career, and university education preparedness as well as their personal and social capabilities is known as a school guidance counsellor (Shehu, 2014). Shehu added that school guidance counsellors are dedicated to offering high-quality educational assistance to improve each student's educational chances in elementary, secondary, and special education settings.

Some guidance counsellors in secondary schools today are also counsellors tasked with advising students on how to make well-informed decisions on their future in regard to training, education, and job, claims Ezebuiro (2014). Additionally, Shehu stated that these guidance counsellors are tasked with advising students and teachers on how to prevent confrontation. Ezebuiro listed a few intervention strategies that school counsellors could use to resolve conflicts in an efficient manner. These strategies include of both moral and administrative intervention strategies. The researcher is concerned that chaos and indiscipline among instructors and students will be common in secondary schools in Gombe State if intervention approaches for conflict resolution in schools are not implemented. This will negatively impact instruction and learning, and consequently, how well students perform on internal and external tests. This concern served as the impetus for the researchers to look into how counsellors in Gombe State's secondary schools perceived the intervention strategies used for conflict resolution.

School counsellors can manage students' tendencies to avoid or withdraw from demanding academic tasks by equipping them with more constructive and socially acceptable coping strategies. This approach represents an administrative intervention method for resolving conflicts in secondary schools (Greenhalgh, 2019). For instance, when students ask for assistance, it must be provided. Counsellors use clearly defined classroom rules as an administrative intervention strategy for secondary school conflict resolution. Students are informed of the rules' purpose and find them to be relevant, authentic, and meaningful (Iravo, 2021).

Counsellors use clear communication of expectations, rules, procedures, and consequences to

students as an intervention strategy to address conflict in the classroom, according to Oguzie

(2014). The best rules that counsellors provide for students are those that are encouraging and describe what the students should do rather than what they should not do. As a result, this regulation serves as a reminder to the students of exactly what is expected of them. This draws attention to the rationale behind the rules and encourages group debate among the students on the guidelines they will abide by.

As a means of moral intervention approaches for conflict resolution, school counsellors instruct children in perspective taking, self-control, and social behaviour like sharing (Greenhalgh, 2019). Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that a counsellor with strong moral character and effectiveness needs to be able to regulate students' conduct. Counsellors teach students empathy and self-discipline, two qualities that are essential components of character. One of the four core elements in the cognitive–developmental framework of moral maturity is students' capacity to translate their moral understanding into concrete action. This component aligns closely with the development of moral will in managing conflicts within secondary schools, a value that counsellors intentionally cultivate in learners (White, 2019). School counsellors, who may be male or female, play a vital role in guiding students toward this practical expression of moral vision.

One important aspect influencing teachers' expertise and knowledge is gender. The views of male and female counsellors working in Gombe State's public secondary schools are included in this study. Conflict in schools, however, can lead to anarchy, a collapse of law and order, and a drop in educational standards if it is ignored. It is impossible to overstate the importance of counsellors participating in conflict resolution in secondary schools. Thus, it became necessary to conduct an empirical study on the use of conflict resolution intervention approaches by counsellors in Gombe State secondary schools. This was the gap that this study attempted to fill.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher has observed student disagreement over the years as a teacher, and when left unresolved, these conflicts have an impact on the school's growth. Unresolved conflict leads to ongoing disagreements, arguments, and hostility between the school's administration, counsellors, and students. The researcher also noticed that a lack of intervention strategies for conflict resolution made student conflict worse. The students' persistently low academic performance on both internal and external exams appears to have been influenced by this unpleasant circumstance. The administrative and moral intervention strategies are the main topics of this study. Nonetheless, it appears that school administration has a significant influence on how disputes are resolved in classrooms. Counsellors' contribution to dispute resolution may not always be fully acknowledged. Because of their interactions with students and their roles in schools, counsellors ought to be actively involved in conflict resolution. As a result, the study was required.

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this research was to examine the extent to which counsellors utilize

intervention strategies for managing conflicts in secondary schools in Gombe State. Specifically,

the study intended to:

1. Assess the level at which counsellors apply administrative intervention strategies in resolving conflicts within secondary schools in Gombe State.
2. Evaluate the extent to which counsellors implement moral-based intervention approaches for conflict resolution in secondary schools in Gombe State.

Research Questions

The study was directed by the following research questions:

1. Which administrative intervention strategies are employed by counsellors in managing conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State?
2. Which moral-based intervention approaches are utilized by counsellors in addressing conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no statistically significant difference between the average responses of male and female counsellors regarding the administrative intervention strategies they employ in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State.
2. There is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female counsellors concerning the moral intervention approaches they utilize in managing conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State.

Methodology

For this study, a census survey research design was used. Idoko (2011) states that a census survey is a type of research design in which information is gathered from all members of the target community. This statistical enumeration design examines every member of the population. Because it enables the researcher to gather original data and characterize their condition as they exist in their natural environment, the census survey research strategy is thus thought to be the most suitable for this study. It offers a higher level of data accuracy and comprehensive data for the entire population being studied. This claim led to the conclusion that this design was the best suitable for the research. The study's focus was Gombe State. One of the five states in North-East Nigeria is Gombe State, which has seventeen (11) local government units. Gombe, Kaltungo, Balanga, Yelmatu Deba , Nafada, and Billiri are the six local government area in the state. The 113 counsellors (45 men and 68 women) who were employed by Gombe State's 115 senior public secondary schools at the time of the study's completion made up the study's population. The full population of 113 respondents participated in the study because the counsellor population was comparatively manageable. Consequently, no sampling was done.

The researcher's "Counsellors' Adoption of Intervention Techniques for Conflict Resolution"

(CAITCR) questionnaire was used to gather data. A and B are the two sections of the

questionnaire. While section B contains two clusters, section A contains two items that solicited biographical information from the respondents. While Cluster 2 contains six items on moral intervention approaches, Cluster 1 contains thirteen items on administrative intervention techniques. Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) are the four response options on the questionnaire. The values for these options are 4, 3, 2, and 1.

Three specialists from Gombe State University verified the instrument: two from the Guidance and Counselling Department and one from the Department of Mathematics and Computer Education's Measurement and Evaluation section. The researcher employed the Cronbach Alpha reliability estimate to examine data gathered at coefficients of .80 for cluster 1 and .78 for cluster 2 in order to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The researcher then used the instrument to gather data for the study after determining the overall instrument's coefficient, which came out to be .71. The researcher deemed this to be high enough.

With the support of six trained research assistants who participated in a one-day briefing on the procedures for administering and collecting the instrument the researcher distributed 113 questionnaire copies to the participants. Given the respondents' professional commitments, they were granted sufficient time to complete the instrument. A convenient date for retrieval was then jointly scheduled by the researcher and the respondents.

Out of the 113 questionnaires administered, 105 were successfully returned, representing a response rate of 92.9%. The collected data were analyzed using the mean, standard deviation, and t-test statistical tools. The questionnaire items were structured on a four-point Likert scale comprising Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), assigned weights of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. A benchmark mean of 2.50 was established by dividing the total assigned weights by four.

A mean score of 2.50 and above was interpreted as "Agree," whereas a mean below 2.50 was regarded as "Disagree." Similarly, each null hypothesis was rejected when the calculated t-value was greater than or equal to the critical value, and retained when the computed t-value was less than the critical value. These decision criteria served as the basis for interpreting the data collected, enabling the researcher to address the research questions and test the hypotheses that guided the study.

Results

Research Question 1

Which administrative intervention strategies are utilized by counsellors in managing conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State?

Table 1: *Mean and standard deviation of respondents' ratings on the administrative intervention*

strategies employed in resolving conflicts among secondary school students.

S/n	**Administrative intervention techniques Adopted in resolving conflicts include;**	**SA (4)**	**A (3)**	**D (2)**	**SD (1)**	**X**	**SD**
1.	Engaging stakeholders in the development of school rules and regulations aimed at addressing and resolving conflicts within the school.	8	12	23	62	1.68	0.96
2.	Involving security agencies in resolving conflicts in school	16	35	29	25	2.40	1.02
3.	Counsellor's advice that dissident students be expelled.	19	36	30	20	2.51	1.00
4.	Counsellors invite PTA to settle disputes	11	13	32	49	1.87	1.00
5.	Advise the school management to set up a committee to settle conflicts	15	41	25	24	2.45	1.00
6.	Encourage the school management to close down the school to avoid students' riot.	10	45	26	24	2.39	0.95
7.	Use normal statutory procedures for resolving conflicts.	21	35	31	18	2.56	1.00
8.	Ensure adequate teaching and learning within a conducive environment to preoccupy the time of the students.	22	34	31	18	2.57	1.01
9.	Inviting school disciplinary committee headed by principal of the school, to settle such conflict.	12	46	24	23	2.45	0.96
10.	Recommending clear demarcation of line of duty to helping resolving conflicts.	14	48	17	26	2.48	1.01
11.	Use adequate communication strategies to disseminate information towards resolving conflict.	18	39	28	20	2.52	0.99
12.	Counsellors invite influential PTA members to have a dialogue with the partners concerned for a lasting and financial settlement of conflicts.	15	37	27	26	2.39	1.01
13.	Counsellors invite clergy to help settle conflicts in schools.	9	15	28	53	1.81	0.98
	Grand Mean					**2.31**	**0.99**

The grand mean was 2.31 and the standard deviation was 0.99, according to the results shown in Table 1. This suggested that when it comes to settling disputes between secondary school pupils in Gombe State, counsellors do not employ administrative intervention strategies. The items' standard deviation also showed that respondents' opinions on the matter were mostly in agreement.

Research Question 2

Which moral-based intervention strategies are employed by counsellors in addressing conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State?

Table 2: *Mean and standard deviation of respondents' ratings on the moral intervention strategies utilized by counsellors in conflict resolution.*

S/n	Moral intervention techniques adopted in resolving conflict include;	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	X	SD
14.	Counsellors use prayers to God to resolve conflict	5	11	18	71	1.52	0.87
15.	Counsellors advice conflicting parties or Individuals to tolerate one another or each other in the interest of peace.	36	42	17	10	2.99	0.94
16.	Counsellors instruct parties or individuals involved in conflict to have a forgiving spirit	24	44	23	14	2.74	0.96
17.	Utilization of neglect to disarm the combatants emotionally.	18	34	33	20	2.48	0.99
18.	Utilization of the principle of doing to others what you would like to bed one to you.	12	17	31	45	1.96	1.03
19.	Utilizing the win-win conflict resolution strategy.	10	19	26	50	1.90	1.02
	Grand Mean					**2.27**	**0.97**

According to the results in Table 2, counsellors in Gombe State do not use moral intervention tactics to settle disputes between secondary school students. The grand mean of 2.27, which is less than the criterion mean of 2.50, makes this clear. The respondents' consistent viewpoints were demonstrated by the aggregate standard deviation score of 0.97.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is no statistically significant difference between the average responses of male and female counsellors regarding the administrative intervention strategies they employ in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State.

Table 3: *The t-test analysis comparing respondents' views on the use of administrative*

intervention strategies for conflict resolution.

Groups	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male counsellors	41	2.27	0.61				
				103	1.15	1.96	Ho not rejected
Female counsellors	64	2.12	0.72				

Based on the t-test results presented in Table 3, the calculated t-value of 1.15 is lower than the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance with 103 degrees of freedom. Consequently, the null hypothesis was retained. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the opinions of male and female counsellors regarding the use of administrative intervention strategies to resolve conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State.

Hypotheses 2

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female counsellors concerning the moral intervention strategies they utilize in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State.

Table 4: *The t-test analysis of respondents' mean scores on the implementation of moral intervention strategies.*

Groups	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male counsellors	41	2.25	0.68	103	0.79	1.96	Ho not rejected
Female counsellors	64	2.14	0.70				

The t-test results presented in Table 4 indicate that at the 0.05 level of significance with 103 degrees of freedom, the calculated t-value of 0.79 is lower than the critical value of 1.96. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference between the opinions of male and female counsellors regarding the use of moral intervention strategies in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Gombe State. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained.

Discussion of the Findings

The study's conclusions are examined below in light of the research questions and hypotheses that served as its compass.

According to the findings of the first research question, most respondents said that counsellors in Gombe State do not use administrative intervention strategies to settle disputes amongst secondary school students. The results are consistent with those of Ezebuiro (2018), who found that guidance counsellors' use of administrative intervention tactics to settle disputes in secondary schools in the Umuahia South local government area has fallen short of expectations.

Ezebuiro went on to blame principals' failure to include guidance counsellors in the administrative process for the poor implementation of administrative intervention strategies by guidance counsellors. This is consistent with Enyiazu (2015), who observed that secondary school guidance counsellors appeared to have failed in their responsibilities due to the administrators' alleged incapacity to include guidance counsellors in secondary school administration. Therefore, secondary school principals should see participation of counsellors in the administrative process as one of the most important administrative technique of conflict resolution in schools. This is because involving counsellors in the administrative process will improve their proficiency, originality, and dedication in using administrative intervention strategies to settle disputes between secondary school pupils. The study also showed that the views of male and female counsellors regarding the use of administrative methods to settle disputes between Gombe State secondary school students were consistent. This is consistent with the findings of Ezebuiro (2018), who found that the degree to which guidance counsellors use administrative intervention techniques to settle disputes amongst students is independent of gender.

Counsellors in secondary schools in Gombe State do not use moral intervention techniques to resolve conflicts, according to the results of the analysis of study question two. This finding is consistent with Oguzie (2014), who claimed that teachers' and guidance counsellors' inadequate use of moral intervention tactics was the cause of ongoing violence, fighting, miscommunication, protests, and riots among Nigerian secondary school students. This necessitates a critical evaluation of the moral intervention strategies used by counsellors to help students in order to lessen conflict and enhance their academic success in our educational system. Additionally, as these actions will act as a means of self-realization, counsellors should learn to use moral intervention tactics while working with students to enhance their academic achievement and moral decay. The findings of the second hypothesis's analysis showed that there was no discernible difference in the views of male and female counsellors on the use of moral intervention strategies to settle disputes between Gombe State's secondary school students. This is corroborated by Oguzie (2014), who found that guidance counsellors, both male and female, shared similar opinions about how much morality was used in secondary school conflict resolution.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were reached in light of the data. It can be inferred that when it came to settling disputes between secondary school pupils in Gombe State, counsellors did not use administrative or moral intervention strategies. Additionally, it was determined that there was no significant difference between the views of male and female counsellors about the use of administrative and moral intervention approaches to resolve conflict among Gombe State secondary school students.

However, disorder and indiscipline among instructors and students will be common in secondary schools in Gombe State if intervention strategies including administrative and moral

intervention approaches are not used for dispute resolution in schools. This will have a negative impact on instruction and learning, and consequently, on how well students perform on internal and external tests. Counsellors should thus use these intervention strategies since they will undoubtedly put the school in a position to successfully fulfil its primary goals of societal change and knowledge distribution.

Recommendations

The researcher makes the following recommendations in light of the study's findings and conclusions.

1. To familiarize counsellors with administrative and moral intervention strategies, the government and ministry of education should host seminars and workshops. Students' academic achievement and counselling productivity will both improve as a result.
2. The government and school officials should make sure that all of the state's schools employ only certified counsellors. This will lessen students' moral deterioration and raise the standard of secondary education.
3. In order to prevent conflict from arising from such deficiencies, the government should provide schools with adequate staffing, equipment, resources, and other facilities.
4. Every school should include a functioning guidance and counselling unit with professional counsellors serving as the heads in order to provide a calm learning environment and improve secondary school students' academic performance.

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Abstract

Conflict is an aspect of human existence and interaction; it arises across all facets of life from interpersonal relationships to institutional dynamics. While often perceived as inherently negative, conflict can serve as a catalyst for growth and transformation when approached constructively. This paper explores the multifaceted nature of conflict and the important role of counselling in its resolution. It identifies key causes of conflict ranging from poor communication and value differences to power struggles and structural inequalities, and outlines how counselling provides a therapeutic framework for addressing these root issues. Emphasising empathy, emotional regulation, and active listening, counselling transforms adversarial interactions into opportunities for mutual understanding, healing, and collaboration. The paper further analyses practical conflict resolution strategies such as mediation, negotiation, arbitration, and restorative dialogue. Ultimately, the paper argues that integrating counselling into conflict resolution is not merely an option but a strategic necessity for fostering personal development, organisational harmony, and sustainable peace in an increasingly divided world.

Keywords: Conflicts, Counselling, Resolution, Counselling strategies

Introduction

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of contemporary human interaction, manifesting across personal, organisational, and societal domains. In today's interconnected world, the frequency and intensity of conflicts have become more visible due to globalisation, heightened social awareness, and rapid communication through digital platforms. Scholars define conflict as "a perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties' current aspirations are incompatible" (Pruitt & Kim, 2004, p. 2). It may range from mild disagreements to intense disputes, and can manifest at multiple levels, including intrapersonal (within the self), interpersonal (between individuals), and systemic or structural conflict (within institutions or societies). Rather than disappearing, conflict has adapted to modern social dynamics, extending beyond physical spaces into digital arenas where online harassment, misinformation, and cyberbullying aggravate social tensions (Chen et al., 2021). Additionally, global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic intensified interpersonal and institutional conflicts, with communities experiencing stress from economic disruption, health

inequalities, and competing priorities (Morrissey & Schmidt, 2022). The persistence of violent

disputes in workplaces, families, educational institutions, and communities reflects the present state of conflict as a multidimensional challenge that must be managed constructively rather than allowed to fester destructively.

The causes of modern conflicts are equally complex. Poor communication, value differences, competition for scarce resources, and structural inequalities remain central to many disputes. Contemporary studies emphasise that economic hardships, social inequality, and cultural diversity, while enriching, also create fertile ground for tension when left unmanaged (Adeoye & Alabi, 2018; Mensah & Frimpong, 2020). Furthermore, political polarisation and rapid technological changes exacerbate divisions, making conflict resolution more difficult. With the rise of social media, disagreements once confined to private spaces now spill into public discourse, amplifying hostility and widening divisions (Papacharissi, 2019). Such tensions can take either constructive or destructive forms. Constructive conflict promotes dialogue, mutual respect, and problem-solving, while destructive conflict is marked by blame, aggression, and avoidance, often escalating into cycles of mistrust, resentment, or violence that erode institutional stability and interpersonal harmony. This distinction underscores why conflict today is both pervasive and particularly challenging, necessitating multidimensional approaches that blend communication, emotional intelligence, and structured problem-solving.

Within this context, conflict resolution refers to the structured processes and strategies aimed at addressing and transforming disputes constructively, ideally by identifying underlying needs, correcting dysfunctional patterns, and restoring or improving relationships (Deutsch et al., 2011). One promising approach is counselling, which provides a therapeutic and empathetic framework for dealing with conflict. Counselling is a professional helping relationship where a trained individual assists another in navigating personal, emotional, or social difficulties through empathetic listening, insight, and guidance (McLeod, 2013). In conflict settings, counselling not only helps individuals recognise conflict dynamics but also equips them with tools for healthier resolution. Scholars such as Corey (2017); Okech and Rubel (2019) opined that counselling techniques including active listening, empathy building, and emotional regulation can transform adversarial encounters into opportunities for growth and collaboration. This makes counselling especially relevant in schools, workplaces, correctional facilities, and faith-based institutions, where unresolved disputes often disrupt cohesion and productivity. Beyond interpersonal healing, integrating counselling into conflict resolution contributes to broader goals of organisational harmony and sustainable peace building (Nwankwo & Eze, 2021). The justification for this study, therefore, rests on the urgent need to explore how counselling can be strategically employed as both a preventive and transformative tool in conflict resolution addressing immediate disputes while also fostering resilience for long-term peace and development.

Causes of Conflict

Conflict frequently arises from poor communication, which remains one of the most immediate and common triggers of misunderstanding. Recent studies indicate that unclear messaging, misinterpretations, and insufficient exchange of information often create fertile ground for suspicion and mistrust (Mayer, 2020). Much of human interaction depends on the ability to convey thoughts, emotions, and intentions clearly; when this capacity is compromised, even small issues can escalate unnecessarily. In organisational contexts, a poorly phrased directive may be perceived as authoritarian, while in personal relationships, silence or lack of clarity might be interpreted as disregard or avoidance. When individuals are unable to accurately interpret the intentions of others, misalignment occurs, often leading to frustration and resentment. This communication gap does more than cause confusion; it also lays the foundation for deeper disagreements rooted in perception and values.

Closely linked to communication breakdowns are differences in values and beliefs, which often intensify once openness and mutual clarity are lost. Deeply held cultural, religious, or ethical convictions frequently push individuals and groups into rigid positions, especially when they feel these principles are being challenged or dismissed. Contemporary scholars argue that conflicts grounded in identity and belief systems remain among the most intractable because they directly affect people's sense of self (Sandy & Owusu, 2019). When individuals or groups perceive that their traditions, moral codes, or cultural practices are being devalued, the willingness to compromise diminishes while polarisation intensifies. Such clashes often escalate beyond mere disagreements, evolving into confrontations over recognition and respect. For instance, inter-religious tensions or cultural rivalries within diverse societies frequently flare up when one group perceives its values as marginalised in favour of another's, fuelling mistrust and antagonism.

As these differences deepen, conflicts often extend into competition over scarce resources. Tangible and symbolic resources such as money, recognition, political influence, or even attention are finite, and competing claims can quickly heighten tensions. Current research suggests that in competitive environments where resources are perceived as limited, hostility tends to intensify because one party's gain is seen as another's loss (Akinwale, 2019). In workplaces, this may manifest in rivalries over promotions or recognition, while in communities, disputes often revolve around access to land, water, or government benefits. When people perceive that others are benefiting at their expense, resentment grows, and defensive or aggressive behaviours emerge. Scarcity amplifies insecurity, often pushing parties to view cooperation as weakness and conflict as a necessary strategy for survival or advancement.

This competitive atmosphere naturally fosters conflicting objectives, particularly when goals are structured in mutually exclusive ways. Scholars note that when the success of one party inherently blocks another's aspirations, adversarial relationships tend to form (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017). In such circumstances, cooperation declines because the goals themselves are

irreconcilable. This often produces deliberate opposition, where individuals or groups no longer simply disagree but actively obstruct one another's progress. In politics, for instance, parties may resist policies not because they are harmful but because they provide an advantage to opponents. In personal relationships, incompatible lifestyle goals or long-term visions can create persistent friction. The result is often entrenched opposition and escalating power struggles.

Power struggles and imbalances further compound conflicts, often surfacing in situations where inequities in control, influence, or representation are evident. Power is no longer viewed simply as a possession but as a dynamic process that shapes interactions and relationships (Joseph, 2020). When groups or individuals feel marginalised, excluded, or denied equal opportunities, resistance and opposition naturally arise. These struggles are especially pronounced in contexts where transparency and accountability are lacking, and where authority is exercised without fairness or consultation. Such imbalances erode trust and intensify resentment, as those excluded from decision-making attempt to challenge or destabilise the dominant structures. For example, workplace hierarchies that disregard employee input or political systems that silence minority voices often become breeding grounds for persistent conflict.

Beneath these structural and relational struggles lie deeper psychological needs that drive conflict at its core. Contemporary extensions of Human Needs Theory emphasise that conflict often reflects unmet needs such as recognition, autonomy, identity, and security (Fisher, 2018). When these fundamental needs are ignored or violated, people may respond with defensiveness or aggression, using conflict as a way to assert dignity or demand acknowledgment. Emotional tensions such as rejection, fear, or humiliation frequently intertwine with material grievances, producing disputes that are both personal and systemic. For instance, workplace disagreements may go beyond salary concerns, reflecting instead an employee's unmet need for respect and validation. When such needs remain unaddressed, hostility hardens, making resolution increasingly difficult.

Finally, these interpersonal and psychological dynamics are reinforced by broader structural problems that shape the context in which conflicts unfold. Poor institutional design, discriminatory practices, rigid hierarchies, and ambiguous roles all create fertile ground for recurring tensions. More recent applications of structural violence theory stress that systemic inequalities and institutional dysfunctions silently fuel conflict by perpetuating exclusion and limiting opportunities (Galtung & Fischer, 2017; Uyang & Eze, 2021). For example, when education, employment, or resource-distribution policies consistently disadvantage certain groups, resentment accumulates and disputes become inevitable. These institutional flaws not only ignite conflict but also sustain it, trapping individuals and communities within systems that fail to meet their needs or safeguard their rights. In this way, structural inequity and institutional breakdown provide a persistent backdrop against which other sources of conflict escalate.

Counselling Strategies

Choosing the right strategies in conflict resolution is crucial, as the effectiveness of any approach depends not only on the people involved but also on the broader context of the situation and the emotions at play. Conflicts are rarely one-dimensional; they carry emotional, psychological, and social undertones that make quick fixes inadequate. A temporary silencing of disagreements may create surface-level calm, but beneath the surface, resentment and frustration often remain unresolved, resurfacing later in more destructive forms. Therefore, conflict resolution strategies must be understood as dynamic and flexible tools, designed not to suppress tension but to guide individuals from confrontation toward cooperation. The ultimate aim of these strategies is not merely to stop arguments but to address underlying causes, rebuild trust, and cultivate healthier and more sustainable relationships over time (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2019).

One of the most widely recognised strategies is mediation, a voluntary and structured process that enables conflicting parties to engage under the guidance of a neutral third party. The mediator's task is not to impose solutions but to create a safe and supportive environment in which dialogue unfolds constructively. By facilitating open communication, the mediator ensures that each individual feels heard and validated, thereby reducing hostility and mistrust. Mediation has proven especially effective in emotionally charged situations or where preserving ongoing relationships is essential, such as between colleagues, family members, or community members (Tidwell, 2020). Instead of focusing on blame, mediation shifts attention toward shared interests, helping participants move beyond entrenched positions and explore common ground. In this way, mediation not only resolves disputes but also fosters reconciliation and strengthens relational bonds.

Another critical strategy is negotiation, which emphasises direct communication and collaboration between the parties involved. Unlike zero-sum approaches that produce winners and losers, negotiation seeks mutually acceptable solutions that respect the needs of all stakeholders. Successful negotiation requires patience, active listening, and the ability to distinguish between underlying needs and surface demands. For instance, in workplace disputes, negotiation may involve clarifying job expectations, redefining responsibilities, or adjusting workloads. Counsellors who support negotiation often encourage individuals to adopt a cooperative rather than a competitive mindset, promoting empathy, flexibility, and shared problem-solving (Curle, 2018). Applied in personal disputes, professional environments, or organisational contexts, negotiation remains a cornerstone of sustainable conflict resolution.

When compromise proves elusive, arbitration offers a practical alternative. Arbitration introduces a neutral third party who listens to both sides and delivers a decision that may be binding or non-binding depending on prior agreement. Unlike mediation or negotiation, which prioritise dialogue and understanding, arbitration provides formal structure and definitive outcomes. While it may not address emotional dimensions in depth, arbitration ensures clarity, efficiency, and closure qualities particularly valuable in professional, commercial, or institutional

disputes (Moffitt, 2019). It is often chosen when time is limited or when parties seek to avoid lengthy and expensive court processes. Although arbitration may lack the healing potential of restorative approaches, its decisiveness prevents prolonged uncertainty and escalation.

For conflicts with deeper emotional or relational roots, restorative dialogue provides a healing-centred approach. This method recognises that disputes are rarely about abstract issues alone but involve people carrying real experiences and wounds. Restorative dialogue involves not only the conflicting parties but also others impacted by the situation, such as victims, offenders, family members, or community representatives. The aim is not punishment but acknowledgment of harm, acceptance of responsibility, and collaborative exploration of constructive pathways forward. Research highlights its effectiveness in schools, juvenile justice systems, and community contexts, where relationships are as important as resolution (Zehr & Mika, 2018; Llewellyn, 2020). By centering on accountability, dialogue, and healing, this approach reduces the likelihood of repeated conflict and fosters long-term reconciliation.

Closely related is collaborative problem-solving, which emphasises collective responsibility and shared ownership of both problems and solutions. Rather than focusing on blame or hierarchical decisions, this strategy empowers all parties to identify root causes and co-create solutions. Collaborative problem-solving thrives in environments that value inclusivity, teamwork, and cooperation, such as schools, NGOs, and workplace teams. Guided by a counsellor or facilitator, the process builds trust, mutual respect, and openness, ensuring that each participant's perspective is valued. Research shows that inclusive, participatory processes often generate innovative solutions that are more practical and widely accepted, while also strengthening relationships and group cohesion (Sullivan, 2021).

Finally, one of the most preventive strategies is assertiveness and communication training, which equips individuals with skills to manage disagreements constructively before they escalate. Many conflicts are less about the content of what is said than the manner in which it is expressed tone, delivery, or timing. Assertiveness training helps individuals express needs and boundaries clearly yet respectfully, avoiding both passivity and aggression. Similarly, communication training builds empathy, active listening, and constructive dialogue skills, ensuring that interactions remain respectful even under stress. Such training is particularly valuable for leaders, educators, youth, and professionals working in high-pressure settings (Alper et al., 2020; Rahim, 2017). By fostering psychological safety and mutual respect, these skills not only defuse potential conflicts but also strengthen long-term relational and organisational health.

Together, these counselling strategies highlight that conflict resolution is not simply about eliminating disagreement but about transforming adversarial dynamics into opportunities for growth, healing, and collaboration. When applied thoughtfully, these approaches help uncover the root causes of conflict, rebuild trust, and establish healthier interaction patterns. More importantly, they show that conflict, when managed constructively, can act as a catalyst for personal development, organisational effectiveness, and sustainable social peace.

The Role of Counsellors in Conflict Resolution

Counsellors no doubt have, and will always continue to play, key roles in conflict resolution. As McLeod (2019) observes, effective counselling involves listening without judgement, asking powerful questions, and enabling clients to make their own informed decisions in the face of interpersonal difficulties. At its core, counselling is not just about advising or providing ready-made solutions, but about facilitating self-awareness, emotional regulation, communication, and problem-solving. Recent scholarship emphasises that counselling is particularly relevant in contexts of increasing social diversity, where cultural competence and sensitivity are crucial in addressing conflicts arising from differences in values, identities, or expectations (Sue & Sue, 2019). This underscores the evolving significance of counselling as a dynamic, context-sensitive practice rather than a rigid set of techniques.

One of the most important ways counsellors contribute to conflict resolution is by promoting active listening and empathy. Drawing on Carl Rogers' person-centred approach, empathy remains a central condition for therapeutic change and relational healing (Rogers, 1951). A well-conducted counselling session provides a communication environment in which all parties feel genuinely heard. Active listening reduces defensiveness and misunderstanding, while empathy encourages each participant to view the conflict from the other's perspective. More recent studies reaffirm that empathy enhances reconciliation processes by allowing individuals to humanise the "other" in conflict, thereby breaking cycles of blame and hostility (Clark, 2020; Elliott et al., 2018). This mutual understanding often reveals that disputes are not solely about surface issues but also about emotions and unmet needs, which must be acknowledged before resolution can be achieved.

Another significant role is helping individuals clarify the underlying issues that fuel the conflict. Counselling enables conflicting parties to move beyond surface-level complaints and identify root causes such as insecurity, past trauma, or misaligned expectations. Corey (2017) notes that counsellors achieve this by asking reflective, open-ended questions that allow clients to articulate their true feelings and values. Recent work in conflict transformation literature supports this, highlighting that clarifying root issues prevents temporary solutions and instead fosters long-term relational healing (Lederach & Lederach, 2019). This deeper exploration enhances self-insight and promotes honest dialogue between the parties, making it possible to tackle not only the symptoms of conflict but also its deeper psychological and relational foundations.

Counsellors also play a vital role in teaching emotional regulation. Since conflicts are often driven by intense emotions anger, fear, resentment that cloud judgement and escalate tensions, counselling helps clients recognise, label, and manage their feelings constructively. Through techniques such as mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, and breathing exercises, individuals learn to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively, reducing the likelihood of further escalation. Recent research highlights the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in

equipping individuals to de-escalate emotionally charged conflicts, particularly in workplace and family contexts (Kabat-Zinn, 2018; Gratz et al., 2020). By cultivating self-regulation, counselling empowers individuals to engage in conflict resolution from a calmer, more balanced standpoint.

In addition, counselling facilitates constructive communication. One of the most critical contributions in conflict settings is helping individuals develop effective communication skills such as assertiveness, the use of "I" statements rather than blaming language, and reflective listening (Bolton, 1986). These tools de-escalate tension and foster respectful, goal-oriented discussions. Communication-focused interventions have been shown to significantly reduce relational breakdowns, as they help participants shift from adversarial postures to collaborative dialogue (Oetzel et al., 2018). Over time, clients gain the capacity to express concerns in ways that are more likely to be acknowledged and addressed, thereby strengthening interpersonal relationships and reducing the recurrence of similar disputes.

Equally important is the counsellor's role in encouraging reflection and accountability. Instead of focusing solely on the faults of the opposing party, counselling sessions invite individuals to reflect on their own roles in the conflict. This fosters personal responsibility, growth, and openness to compromise. Such shifts in perspective can lead to more sincere apologies, readiness to repair trust, and constructive engagement. Contemporary studies emphasise that accountability is not only an individual process but also a relational one, requiring both self-reflection and recognition of the impact on others (Brown, 2018; Worthington & Sandage, 2021). In this way, counsellors help move disputants from a blame-oriented stance toward a growth-oriented one that opens the door for genuine reconciliation.

Furthermore, counsellors support collaborative problem-solving by guiding parties toward realistic and mutually acceptable solutions. Rather than imposing resolutions, they facilitate brainstorming, evaluation of alternatives, and negotiation of agreements. This co-creative process makes outcomes more sustainable, since they are embraced by all sides involved. According to Fisher and Shapiro (2021), collaborative conflict resolution enhances long-term satisfaction because solutions are more likely to align with the underlying needs and values of the individuals involved. By encouraging creative problem-solving, counsellors empower clients not only to resolve current disputes but also to develop skills that can be applied to future challenges.

Finally, counsellors provide a safe and neutral space in which individuals can engage productively. In emotionally charged conflicts, this neutrality is invaluable. Acting as impartial facilitators, counsellors create an atmosphere of psychological safety where participants feel free to express themselves without fear of judgement or retaliation. This balanced environment fosters openness and reduces the threat of escalation, allowing parties to work toward reconciliation more effectively. Recent studies confirm that the presence of a neutral, trusted facilitator significantly increases the likelihood of de-escalation and constructive resolution, particularly in multicultural

or organisational contexts where power dynamics can complicate direct negotiation (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2020). By offering a structured, supportive space, counsellors serve as catalysts for conflict transformation that extends beyond immediate problem-solving.

Conclusion

Promoting lasting peace in today's diverse and often polarised world requires more than simply ending disputes; it demands meaningful engagement with the root causes of conflict and a commitment to personal and collective growth. Counselling, when integrated with effective conflict resolution strategies, serves as a powerful tool for transforming tension into understanding and discord into cooperation. Through active listening, emotional regulation, empathetic communication, and structured problem-solving, counselling helps individuals and groups navigate conflict constructively. It provides a neutral and supportive space where emotions can be explored, misunderstandings clarified, and relationships repaired. As seen across personal, educational, organisational, and community settings, the counsellor's role is essential in empowering people with the skills and insight needed for sustainable peace. In essence, the integration of counselling into conflict resolution is not merely beneficial; it is foundational for building resilient, inclusive, and harmonious societies.

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ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELLORS IN MANAGING ADOLESCENT CONFLICTS IN BILLIRI L.G.A., GOMBE STATE

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Abstract

Adolescent conflicts in Nigerian secondary schools have become increasingly prevalent, manifesting in forms such as peer jealousy, bullying, romantic rivalry, and ethnic-based cliques, which negatively affect students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall school climate. Despite the strategic role of school counsellors in conflict prevention and resolution, many public secondary schools, particularly in rural areas, lack adequately trained and fully engaged counselling personnel. The absence or limited effectiveness of counselling services raises concerns about the capacity of schools to manage adolescent conflicts proactively and systematically.This study therefore investigated the role of school counsellors in managing adolescent conflicts in public secondary schools within Billiri Local Government Area (LGA) of Gombe State. Guided by four research questions and two hypotheses, it assessed the availability of counselling services, nature and frequency of adolescent conflicts, perceived effectiveness of counsellors, and challenges they face. A descriptive survey design using quantitative methods was adopted. Stratified random sampling selected six schools (urban and rural), with 120 students and

12 counsellors participating. Instruments used—Counsellor Role Effectiveness Scale (CRES) and Adolescent Conflict Experience Questionnaire (ACEQ)—were validated and yielded reliability indices of 0.78 and 0.81. Results showed limited availability of trained counsellors, common conflicts such as peer jealousy and bullying, and a positive correlation between active counselling services and lower conflict rates. Challenges included lack of training, heavy workload, and inadequate facilities. The study recommends strengthening counselling units, targeted training, and policy support.

Key words: School Counsellor, Counselling, Conflict, Adolescent Conflicts, Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. During this period, young people are more prone to interpersonal tensions, identity crises, and behavioral fluctuations that can manifest as conflicts with peers, teachers, or authority figures (Santrock, 2021). In school settings, such conflicts may range from verbal arguments and bullying to deeper issues such as romantic rivalry, ethnic-based cliques, and jealousy-driven altercations. These challenges, if left unaddressed, can disrupt academic performance, compromise school safety, and hinder holistic student development (Ugwoke & Ezeani, 2020).

The role of school counsellors in addressing adolescent-related challenges is well established in global education systems. School counselling is a structured professional service designed to support students' academic, emotional, and social development, including the resolution of conflicts (Erford, 2023). Through conflict resolution strategies, psycho-educational interventions, and peer mediation programs, counsellors are positioned to intervene proactively and responsively in student conflicts. However, the effectiveness of school counsellors in Nigerian public schools is often limited by systemic challenges, including insufficient staffing, inadequate training, and lack of institutional support (Egbo & Akpan, 2020).

Conflict, in the context of this study, refers to a situation of disagreement or hostility between individuals or groups, often fueled by misunderstandings, competition, or unmet needs. Among adolescents, conflicts often emerge from social comparison, peer dynamics, romantic interests, and identity exploration (Makinde, 2022). Conflict management involves strategies such as negotiation, mediation, avoidance, or collaboration to de-escalate tensions and restore harmony (Deutsch et al., 2020). School counsellors play a pivotal role in managing conflicts through structured intervention programs, emotional support, and the cultivation of positive peer relationships.

The concept of school counselling as a professional service encompasses not only academic guidance but also emotional and behavioral support aimed at fostering resilience and

interpersonal competence among students. According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2022), a comprehensive counselling program should proactively address issues of bullying, peer conflict, and emotional distress through data-informed interventions and culturally responsive strategies.

Several empirical studies have highlighted the role of counsellors in conflict management. For instance, Eyo et al. (2021) found that the presence of trained school counsellors significantly reduced incidences of bullying and peer aggression in urban schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Similarly, Okeke and Nwachukwu (2020) demonstrated that secondary school students in institutions with functional guidance and counselling units reported higher levels of conflict resolution skills and peer empathy.

In a comparative study between urban and rural schools, Afolayan and Bello (2023) observed that schools with full-time counsellors recorded 35% fewer disciplinary cases related to student conflict than those without. Their findings suggested that counsellors not only mitigate conflict but also educate students on emotional regulation and constructive communication. However, the study also revealed that rural schools are disproportionately underserved in terms of counselling personnel and facilities.

Despite the recognized importance of school counsellors, many Nigerian schools still struggle to integrate counselling services effectively. According to Adewale (2021), approximately 60% of public secondary schools in Northern Nigeria lack full-time trained counsellors, leaving teachers or administrators to manage behavioural issues beyond their expertise. This results in reactive rather than preventive measures, with conflicts escalating due to poor mediation or lack of timely intervention.

While prior research has examined the general impact of guidance counselling on student behavior, few studies have focused specifically on adolescent conflict types, frequency, and the contextual challenges counsellors face in local government areas such as Billiri, Gombe State. There is limited empirical data on how conflict manifests differently in rural versus urban schools, or how the availability and training of school counsellors influence conflict resolution outcomes in such settings. Furthermore, most existing studies have used qualitative or anecdotal methods, with insufficient use of validated psychometric tools to assess counsellor effectiveness and conflict frequency from the students' perspective (Adeleke & Yusuf, 2020). The current study addressed these gaps by employing a quantitative design, using validated instruments, and exploring the relationships among counselling service availability, types of conflicts, counsellor effectiveness, and institutional challenges within a stratified sample of public secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescent conflicts in secondary schools, manifesting as peer jealousy, romantic rivalry, bullying, and ethnic-based cliques continue to disrupt students' academic engagement, emotional stability, and the overall school climate. Although school counsellors are expected to play a

central role in conflict prevention and resolution, the extent to which counselling services effectively manage these conflicts within public secondary schools in Billiri LGA, Gombe State, remains unclear. Empirical evidence documenting the nature, frequency, and management outcomes of adolescent conflicts in this context is limited. Without context-specific data, policy decisions and institutional interventions may lack direction and effectiveness. This study therefore sought to examine the availability, perceived effectiveness, and challenges of school counsellors in managing adolescent conflicts in Billiri LGA.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of availability of active counselling services in secondary schools in Billiri LGA.
2. To examine the nature and frequency of adolescent conflicts in the area.
3. To assess the perceived effectiveness of school counsellors in managing adolescent conflicts.
4. To identify challenges faced by school counsellors in resolving conflicts among adolescents.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the level of availability of active counselling services in secondary schools in Billiri LGA?
2. What are the common types and frequency of adolescent conflicts in these schools?
3. How effective are school counsellors perceived in managing adolescent conflicts?
4. What challenges do school counsellors face in conflict resolution?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in conflict frequency between schools with active counselling services and those without.
2. There is no significant relationship between the perceived effectiveness of school counsellors and the level of conflict management in schools.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design using a quantitative approach was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all public secondary schools in Billiri Local Government Area (LGA) of Gombe State.

A multistage sampling procedure was employed. First, stratified random sampling was used to select six schools based on location (urban and rural strata) to ensure adequate representation.

Within the selected schools, counsellors were selected using purposive sampling because of their specific professional roles, while students were selected using simple random sampling. A total of 120 students and 12 counsellors participated in the study.

Two instruments namely: Counsellor Role Effectiveness Scale (CRES) and Adolescent Conflict Experience Questionnaire (ACEQ) were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by two experts from the Department of Guidance and Counselling, Nasarawa State University. Reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.78 for the ACEQ and 0.81 for the CRES.

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency) and inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation and independent samples t-test) were used for data analysis.

Results

Table 1: *Availability of Trained Counsellors in Schools (N = 132)*

Status	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
No trained counsellor	99	75
Part-time counsellor	26	20
Full-time counsellor	7	5
Total	**132**	**100**

Note. Percentages are based on total respondents.

Table 2: *Common Types of Adolescent Conflicts (n = 120 students)*

Conflict Type	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Peer jealousy	48	40
Romantic rivalry	30	25
Bullying	24	20
Ethnic-based cliques	18	15
Total	**120**	**100**

Note. Responses reflect students' reported experiences.

Table 3: *Challenges Faced by Counsellors (n = 12 counsellors)*

Challenge	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Lack of training	8	66.7
Heavy workload	2	16.7
Inadequate space	2	16.7
Total	**12**	**100.0**

Note. Percentages rounded to one decimal place.

Table 4: *Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results*

Test	**Statistic**	**p-value**	**Interpretation**
Independent samples t-test (conflict rate vs. counsellor availability)	t = 2.87	< .05	Significant difference
Pearson correlation (counsellor effectiveness vs. conflict level)	r = –.62	< .01	Significant negative relationship

Note: Statistical significance determined at .05 and .01 levels.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study shed light on the critical, yet underutilized, role of school counsellors in managing adolescent conflicts in public secondary schools in Billiri LGA, Gombe State. The data revealed four major patterns: a low level of availability of trained school counsellors; common types of adolescent conflicts such as peer jealousy, romantic rivalry, bullying, and ethnic-based cliques; a statistically significant relationship between the presence of active counsellors and reduced conflict frequency; and systemic challenges undermining counsellor effectiveness, including inadequate training, high workloads, and insufficient counselling infrastructure.

The finding that 75% of sampled schools lacked full-time trained counsellors is consistent with earlier studies highlighting a national shortage of qualified guidance personnel in Nigerian public schools (Egbo & Akpan, 2020; Adewale, 2021). This shortage is particularly acute in rural areas, where educational resources are more limited, and where students are more vulnerable to social and emotional challenges due to socioeconomic and cultural constraints (Afolayan & Bello, 2023). The scarcity of trained counsellors in Billiri LGA suggests a systemic gap between policy and practice, despite the National Policy on Education's (FME, 2020) provision for counselling services in all secondary schools.

The study identified peer jealousy (40%), romantic rivalry (25%), bullying (20%), and

ethnic-based cliques (15%) as the most common types of adolescent conflict. These findings align with the work of Ugwoke and Ezeani (2020), who observed that adolescent conflicts often stem from the search for identity, peer validation, and romantic affiliations, particularly in mixed-gender school environments. Moreover, bullying and clique formation have been shown to escalate where there is insufficient adult supervision or weak disciplinary frameworks (Makinde, 2022). The presence of ethnic-based cliques also reflects Nigeria's broader sociopolitical dynamics, where ethnic identities can become sources of exclusion or tension, even among adolescents (Eyo, John, & Effiom, 2021).

Statistical analysis showed a significant negative correlation between the presence of active school counsellors and the frequency of reported conflicts ($r = -0.62$, $p < 0.01$), and a significant difference in conflict incidents between schools with and without active counsellors ($t = 2.87$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that counsellors, when actively engaged, play a preventive and responsive role in mitigating student conflicts. This finding is supported by studies by Erford (2023) and Okeke and Nwachukwu (2020), which argue that school counselling programs contribute to improved peer relationships, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution skills among students. Counsellors also provide safe spaces for students to express frustrations and process interpersonal misunderstandings, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict escalation. However, the current study also revealed that many of the counsellors, even when present, are not effectively supported. This limitation undermines their capacity to deliver impactful services, thereby blunting the potential benefits of their role in schools.

The study found that the major challenges faced by school counsellors in Billiri LGA were lack of training (66.7%), excessive workload (16.7%), and inadequate counselling spaces (16.7%). These findings echo those of Adeleke and Yusuf (2020), who found that many school counsellors in Nigeria are either untrained or overloaded with teaching responsibilities, making it difficult to prioritize student counselling. Moreover, the absence of private counselling rooms compromises the confidentiality and trust required for effective counselling relationships (Erford, 2023).

The issue of inadequate training also reflects the need for ongoing professional development. As adolescent issues evolve, especially with the influence of social media, cyberbullying, and changing social norms, counsellors must be equipped with updated skills and culturally responsive techniques (ASCA, 2022).

The study's findings are consistent with national and regional patterns observed in similar research across Nigeria (Adewale, 2021; Afolayan & Bello, 2023). However, its contribution lies in offering localized data from a relatively under-researched area (Billiri LGA), and in combining student and counsellor perspectives using validated quantitative instruments. By highlighting the specific types of conflict and quantifying counsellor effectiveness, the study moves beyond anecdotal or policy-based discussions and provides empirical grounding for advocacy and reform.

Implications for Counselling Practice

The results underscore the urgent need to institutionalize counselling services in all secondary schools, especially in underserved areas. They also point to the importance of equipping counsellors with the necessary training, resources, and support structures. Without addressing these systemic barriers, the potential of school counsellors to foster safe and inclusive learning environments will remain unrealized. Furthermore, schools must adopt a whole-school approach where counsellors collaborate with administrators, teachers, parents, and students to create a proactive culture of conflict prevention and emotional literacy (Deutsch et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that school counsellors play a vital role in managing adolescent conflicts in public secondary schools within Billiri LGA, Gombe State. The findings revealed that while adolescent conflicts such as peer jealousy, romantic rivalry, bullying, and ethnic-based cliques are common, their frequency is significantly lower in schools with active, trained counsellors. However, the effectiveness of counsellors is hampered by systemic challenges including lack of professional training, high workload, and inadequate counselling facilities. These issues highlight the gap between policy provisions and practical implementation of school counselling services.

Recommendations

1. Government and school management should ensure the deployment of full-time, professionally trained counsellors in all public secondary schools.
2. Regular in-service training and workshops should be organized to update counsellors on modern conflict resolution strategies and adolescent psychology.
3. Schools should provide dedicated, private, and well-equipped spaces for counselling activities to enhance confidentiality and trust.
4. Education authorities should enforce the integration of counselling units into the school system in line with the National Policy on Education.

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RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AMONG PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OWERRI METROPOLIS, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceived effect of counselling-based conflict resolution strategies among senior secondary school students in public schools in Owerri metropolis, Imo state, Nigeria. Prompted by the growing incidence of student conflicts that disrupt school harmony, the research investigated senior secondary school students' perception in the effect of the use of structured counselling interventions to resolve conflicts among students. The study population comprised three thousand and twenty three (3,023) senior secondary school students in the Owerri metropolis that have been exposed to at least 3 sessions of counselling relationships. A sample of three hundred (300) students was selected from the target population using a simple random sampling technique. The study made use of descriptive survey design. Three research questions guided the study. Data collection involved a validated instrument, the Counselling-Based Conflict Resolution Strategy Questionnaire (CBCRSQ). The instrument was administered twice to a similar sample with a two weeks interval. The data collected yielded a reliability value of 0.83 correlation coefficient using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Results revealed that counselling strategies such as peer mediation, active listening, and nonviolent communication can significantly enhance students' conflict resolution abilities. Based on the results, implications were highlighted. The study recommends integrating structured counselling programmes within schools, and curriculum-based conflict resolution education.

Keywords: Interpersonal conflict management, Counselling-based strategies, Peer mediation, Active listening, Nonviolent communication.

Introduction

Individuals are social beings and as long as there is social interaction between people, conflict is inevitable. Interpersonal conflicts among students in secondary schools are common

problems which can negatively impact the school in attaining its set objectives and goals and advertently affect the school climate.

Education lies at the heart of social and economic development and one of the ultimate aims of education is to strengthen the individuals and the society's problem-solving capacity and ability so that people can solve different problems using education (Mukhtar, Salisu, Jagula, Salisu & Umar, 2022). Education improves economy, promotes health, democracy and more, within a given society. Secondary education is received after primary education and before tertiary education, and it prepares an individual for meaningful and productive living, and also equips one for tertiary education (Mbah, Oluka & Alio, 2021). To gain these benefits from education, the role of the professional counsellor is highly significant in managing conflict-generating practices within the school and among students. Secondary schools as part of the social system and an integral part of development, training and socialization of children who transit to adolescence becomes a focal point due to students' behavioural problems and abnormalities in schools which are not new phenomena.

Conflict resolutions need counselling services and the current rate of school-based conflict among senior secondary school students should be attended to through counselling-based conflict resolution strategies. This process is to ensure that students maintain discipline, and to safeguard lives and properties within the school system. The National Policy of Education (NPE, 2004) clearly states that counselling services should be rendered to students in secondary schools in Nigeria. The policy makes clear on the fact that counsellors can be appointed to schools to assist learners or students in academic and personal adjustments for a more rounded outcome (NPE, 2004). Therefore, professional counsellor provides services to students beyond ensuring quality education to include, but not limited to assisting students in skill and knowledge acquisition. No doubt, Abdullahi and Abubakar (2018) noted that counsellors assist individuals acquire skills and experiences necessary to identify opinions, explore alternatives and succeed in life peacefully.

In maintaining discipline, peaceful interaction and co-existence among students, most students use educational approach in addressing and solving conflicts among students (Latipun, Nasir, Zainah & Khairudin, 2012). Counselling-based conflict resolution strategies are rarely put into practice in secondary schools. According to Theberge and Karan (2004), only 8% of students involved in conflict resolution programmes actually apply what they learned in the programme. For discipline and improved cordial behaviour and discipline within the school among the senior secondary students, it becomes imperative to use appropriate counselling-based conflict resolution strategies. A study done in Indonesia found that most of the school principals (97%) believed that counselling was one of the strategies that was effective in preventing and solving conflict among peers (Latipun, 2005). It also believed that counselling is able to improve the relationship among students and promote peace in the school (Latipun, et al, 2012). It was reported by Latipun (2005) that 80% of school principals in Indonesia assumed that school counsellors were responsible for handling students' social and psychological problems.

Hence, as far as students' learning and social interactions are concerned, guidance and counselling remains a fundamental and important component of the educational system in Nigeria.

Agreeably so, counselling as a helping profession is a process of assisting an individual to develop and accept an integrated picture of his aptitude, abilities, interest and interpersonal needs to achieve maximum adjustment to the environment of which school is one of them, so that he can be more effective, satisfied and useful to the society in which he lives (Abdullahi & Abubakar, 2018), and devoid of interpersonal conflict.

Interpersonal conflict refers to a disagreement or discord between two or more people, often stemming from incompatible goals, values or viewpoints. It is a natural part of human interaction which can occur in various settings and social situations. According to Abdullahi and Abubakar (2018), interpersonal conflict also refers to clashes that involves two or more individuals, who perceive each other as being in opposition to preferred outcomes (goals) and or attitudes. While Nelson-Jones (1990) in Abdullahi and Abubakar (2018) sees it as a situation in which one or both individuals in a relationship are experiencing difficulty in working or living with each other. Schools are not immune to this and it can have deleterious impacts on the environment and on school success (Sompa, 2015; Kalagbor & Nnokam, 2015).

Shindlers (2008) views inter-personal conflict as a natural part of any functional class. Conflicts can manifest in verbal or physical violence, riots, lack of participation in class programmes or activities, disturbance for other students, destruction of school facilities and equipment, physical beating/harming of one another, boycotting classes, harassment, and more, which leads to students' poor academic performance, as such, this problem needs to be addressed. Therefore, interpersonal conflict in secondary school today remains a focal point for concern in Nigeria, as students' revolts, unrest and violence have gradually become frequent among students, most especially the senior students in Nigerian secondary schools today.

Accordingly, Mc Namara (2007) Fidelis and Emmanuel (2023) expressed the view that conflict hinders productivity, lowers morale and stimulates inappropriate behaviours in individuals. As such, conflict among students in the school should be managed and curbed to its barest minimum, and which can be actualized through counselling-based conflict resolution strategies. In maintaining peaceful behaviour among students, schools frequently apply strict control over the students (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). Not many schools use counselling-based conflict resolution strategies on interpersonal conflict management among senior secondary school students in Nigeria, which is the thrust of this work.

Conflict resolution is conceptualized as the methods and process involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution. This is the process two or more individuals apply to find amiable solution to a crisis situation or problem. Mukhtar, et al (2022) asserted that conflict resolution can be considered as the process of removing barriers to something for agreement. Conflict resolution and/or management is a process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing its positive aspects (Rahim, 2018).

Counselling-based conflict resolution strategies focuses on helping individuals develop the skills and mindset to navigate disagreement constructively. It involves understanding different

perspectives, communicating effectively and working collaboratively to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Abdullahi and Abubakar (2018) advanced that counselling for conflict resolution are strategies designed to prevent and manage violence in school through counselling, so that students can learn and teachers can perform their jobs in a positive, healthy and safe environment for education and development.

There are different counselling-based strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools, which includes peer mediation, active listening, nonviolent communication, assertive communication, individual counselling, group therapy, organized interaction session with parents to create enlightenment on school rules and regulation, organized seminar/workshop on what constitutes violence and its consequences, orientation services to create awareness for adjustment within the school environment through which the school's do and do-not are explained, information services that provides students with necessary information to assist students thrive within the school and beyond (Abdullahi & Abubakar, 2018).

One of the oldest counselling-based conflict resolution strategy is peer mediation, which involves the student (disputants) taking command of adversarial situations, listen, rely on the problem-solving format, maintain control of disruptions, explore hidden agendas that hinder resolution, and reach an agreement (Testamark, 2007). Peer mediation as a counselling-based conflict resolution strategy is used to address misunderstands or disputes between school mates or peers. It involves using an individual who is usually a peer or fellow student to stand as a third party in order to assist the disputants resolve their problems. The peer mediator aids the individuals involved in conflict to have a better understanding of themselves and the issue they are at variance, thereby amplifying positive communication, promoting and stimulating empathy.

Hence, peer mediation involves constructively managing conflicts. The disputants are shown how to de-escalate conflicts through the use of peer mediation. These strategies can be role played to help them (students) improve their problem-solving skills. Given that 95% of agreements are reached in peer mediation, students are shown how to achieve a reasonable agreement between disputants (Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Miller, Landry, 2000). Alan (2016) observed that students who have taken part in peer mediation work at resolving conflict in a more constructive manner rather than relying on authority. They are more self-controlled, can give non-discriminative decisions and show positive development in various other areas. Tastan (2004) also agrees that conflict is usually at a decline in schools where peer mediation is practiced. Peer mediation as a counselling-based conflict resolution strategy can be effective towards solving students disputes without disrupting their learning and the learning environment (Testamark, 2007), and which can significantly reduce aggression and violence among students, focusing on the senior secondary school students.

The International Listening Association (ILA, 2012) defines active listening as the process of receiving, constructing meaning, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages. According

to Jonsdottir and Fridriksdottir (2020), active listening is the conscious effort to hear and understand both the verbal and non-verbal messages conveyed by another person. It includes paraphrasing the message, asking questions when appropriate, and maintaining moderate to high non-verbal involvement in the conversation (Marija, Davorka, Iko, Andelka & Andrea, 2024). Furthermore, it involves fully engaging with the speaker, processing their message, and responding thoughtfully. This practice goes beyond mere hearing; it requires the listener to interpret emotional cues, clarify understanding and provide feedback that encourages further dialogue (Paramole, Adeoye, Arowosaye & Ibikunle, 2024).

Active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution, is a strategy that can de-escalate interpersonal conflict among students as it impacts uncertainty reduction and can also produce rewarding interactions during conflict resolutions (Paramole, et al, 2024). Senior secondary school students are usually within their adolescence stage and still navigating through their stress and storm, which most likely impedes their interpersonal relationship with peers, especially within the school environment. Active listening, being two-way communication technique demands empathy, attention, practice and a lot of conscious effort. It reflects one's ability to build trust, establish a rapport and demonstrate concern about one's school mates or friends (Pooja, 2020). Active listening makes the speaker feel cared for and understood. A student's willingness to listen, especially during conflict resolution is a mark of emotional regulation, asserts Yuangang (2022).

Non-violent communication (NVC) is a counselling strategy that promotes and amplifies interpersonal communication and understanding. Nonviolent communication is also known as compassionate and collaborative communication with focus on three aspects that include self-empathy, empathy and honest self-expression (Dzaferovic, 2018; Little 2008; Rosenberg, 2006;). It is not necessarily an end to a misunderstanding, rather it helps develop empathic understanding, which improves relationship, interpersonal communication and promotes peaceful coexistence at the long run. Rosenberg (2006), points out that the "extraordinary language of nonviolent communication modifies the relationships between parents and children, teachers and students and all of us, and even the way we treat ourselves".

Violent communication occurs through speaking (how words are used) and listening (how expressions are understood), which can emanate through thinking, self-talk or conversations that are imagined. As such, our thinking, intentions, assumptions, use of power and nonverbal language are just as important, as they highly influence how we listen, express ourselves and interdependently engage with ourselves and with others (Finkelstein, 2016). Studies have shown that the frequency, duration and intensity of peer conflicts decrease with age and experience (Dzaferovic, 2018; Petrovic, 2010;).

Nonviolent communication (NVC) is a model of communication approach, a method,

process, mindset and a way of life (Baturaite-Bunka, Jureviciene, & Skoczowsky-Danielsen, 2024). The use of communication as a skill in the educational environment, specifically schools

play an important role in maintaining peaceful co-existence for optimal learning. As communication involves two or more persons expressing and exchanging thoughts and words actively, it becomes germane for counsellors to focus on nonviolence in communication as a counselling strategy to breed peace and unity which culminates to achieving set academic objectives within the educational system.

Nowadays, children and young people (students) often use the language of violent communication (Maksimovic, Milanovic & Zajic, 2022). These various expressions of violence that results in violent problems show that young people today (who are the students), are less able to feel what others feel (Qudsyi, Trimulyaningsih, Novitasari & Stueck, 2018). Hence, nonviolent communication as a counselling-based conflict resolution strategy, aims to foster connection and understanding through the communication of judgment-free observations, greater recognition of people's feelings, needs and values (Baturaite-Bunka, et al, 2024), resulting in reduced interpersonal conflict and improved interaction between students, especially in senior secondary schools in Nigeria.

Johnson and Johnson (2000), emphasize the necessity to train learners on how to manage conflicts in positive ways in the school. Conflict is an indispensable and normal part of life and without it, improvement and alteration cannot be lived. For this reason, it is very important to gain the ability to use constructive conflict solving methods (Alan, 2016). Students many a times use violence as a way of resolving conflicts among themselves. Studies in America showed that 90% of adolescents could not solve their conflicts, 25% preferred using force, violence and fights to solve their conflicts (Winter, Neal & Waner, 2005). This shows a low preference for conflict resolution as a strategy to addressing and resolving interpersonal issues among students. Therefore, in view of the fact that counselling strategies are techniques and approaches to assist individuals in trouble, this study investigated perceived effects of counselling-based conflict resolution strategies in interpersonal conflict management among senior secondary school students in Owerri metropolis of Imo State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is a recurrent issue in Nigerian secondary schools, especially in urban centres like Owerri metropolis. Students frequently engage in disputes that disrupt academic progress and affect the overall school climate. Despite existing disciplinary measures, conflicts persist, often escalating into violence or long-term animosities. This raises concern about the effect of traditional disciplinary approaches in managing students' behaviour. There is a pressing need to explore sustainable and educationally sound alternatives such as counselling-based strategies that emphasize conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, peer mediation, active listening, nonviolent communication, among others. Out of these myriads of strategies, it is not certain which of the

strategies the students perceive as being effective in conflict resolution. This gap is a knowledge gap in counselling and this study filled it in by investigating the extent to which counselling-based

approaches, such as, peer mediation, active listening and nonviolent communication, can resolve conflicts and foster a conducive learning environment.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of peer mediation in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Research Question 2: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Research Question 3: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of nonviolent communication in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Methodology

Design and Participants

This study adopted an exploratory research design. This is the type of design that is used to gain deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Asika, 2006). The population comprised the three thousand and twenty three (3,023) senior secondary school students in Owerri metropolis, Imo State, that have been exposed to at least three sessions of counselling relationships (Counselling Office, Zonal Education Management Board Owerri, 2025).

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study consists of three hundred (300) senior secondary school students, selected from the population of the study. This sample is drawn from five secondary schools with high number of clients that may have had counselling sessions at least three times. The counsellors in the schools used in this study were requested to nominate clients that have been exposed to at least three sessions in conflict resolution of their challenges. The counsellors nominated five hundred and one (501) qualified clients using the above criteria. Simple random sampling was adopted to obtain three hundred (300) clients used for the study. The essence of using simple random sampling is to give every member of the qualified population equal and independent chance of being selected.

Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire designed by the researchers and named Counselling-Based Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (CBCRSQ). The instrument has two sections, A and B. section A elicits the biographic data of the respondents, while section B contains three sub-sections labelled B1, B2 and B3. B1 addressed issues of student's perceived effect of peer mediation in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy, B2 deals with student's perceived effects of active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy, while B3 solicits for perceived effects of nonviolent communication in counselling-

based conflict resolution strategy. Each of these sub-sections contains four items. The response pattern adopted was a modified four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree

(2) and Strongly Disagree (1).

Face and content validity of the instrument were ensured by giving three copies of the drafts to specialists in psychometrics. Similarly, the reliability of the instrument was also ensured by administering the instrument to a group of fifty students from similar schools not used for the study. The instrument was given to them twice with a time interval of two weeks. The data collected from the first and second administration were correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation formular which yielded a value of 0.83. The instrument was administered on the respondents and data collected and used for analysis.

Administration of the Instrument

The researchers approached the resident counsellors in the schools from where the subjects were drawn, and solicited for their cooperation in administering the instruments to the qualified clients in their schools. The researchers worked with the school counsellors. In all, a total of three hundred (300) copies of the questionnaire were produced and administered to the clients on face to face basis and all were retrieved after the clients responded to them. Three hundred copies of the administered questionnaire were retrieved; there was no instrument mortality.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for the study were analyzed using mean score and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question 1: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of peer mediation in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Table 1: *Mean responses on perceived effect of peer mediation in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy*

S/N	ITEM STATEMENTS	X	SD	REMARKS
1.	I use peer mediation in resolving misunderstanding with school mates.	3.24	0.83	Strongly Agree
2.	I find it easy to use peer mediation to resolve conflicts with my friends in school.	2.91	0.97	Agree
		2.73	1.02	Agree
3.	There's reduction in conflicts when peer mediation is used to resolve issues between my friends and I.			
		2.85	0.80	Agree
4.	Peer mediation is effective in resolving conflicts with friends.			
	Grand Mean	**2.93**	**0.91**	**Agree**

Table 1 shows that item No. 1 had a mean score of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 0.83, indicating that respondents strongly agree that they use peer mediation in resolving

misunderstanding with their school mates. Furthermore, items No. 2, 3, and 4 had the respective mean scores of 2.91, 2.73 and 2.85, and their corresponding standard deviations 0.97, 1.02 and 0.08 showing agreement to the respective item statements. The grand mean score of 2.93 with its average standard deviation of 0.91 indicates that the respondents were not far from the mean and from one another in their responses to the item on research question one. To conclude therefore, the respondents agreed that peer mediation is an effective strategy in counselling-based conflict resolution.

Research Question 2: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Table 2: *Mean responses on students' perceived effect of active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy*

S/N	ITEM STATEMENTS	X	SD	REMARKS
5.	I pay close attention to what is being said in conflict situation.	2.74	1.01	Agree
6.	I observe non-verbal cues like facial expressions and other body gestures in conflict situation.	2.83	0.88	Agree
7.	I have more lasting friendships since I started practicing active listening with friends.	2.75	1.10	Agree
8.	Active listening is helpful in resolving conflicts with my school mates.	2.85	0.81	Agree
	Grand Mean	**2.79**	**0.72**	**Agree**

Table 2 shows items No. 5 to 8 had mean scores of 2.74, 2.83, 2.75 and 2.85 respectively with their corresponding standard deviation of 1.01, 0.88, 1.10 and 0.81 all indicating agreement to the item statements therein. However, the grand mean score of 2.79 which is greater than the reference mean of 2.50 implies that respondents were not far from the mean and from one another in their responses to the items in research question two. To conclude therefore, the respondents agreed that non-verbal cues and active listening are very effective strategies in counselling-based conflict resolution.

Research Question 3: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of nonviolent communication in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Table 3: *Mean responses on students' perceived effect of nonviolent communication in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy*

S/N	ITEM STATEMENTS	X	SD	REMARKS
9.	Non-violent communication is effective in resolving conflicts with my school mates.	3.07	0.93	Strongly Agree
10.	Conflict situation with friends gets easily resolved whenever our communication is not violent.	3.01	1.21	Strongly Agree
11.	Communication with my friends in school has improved since I apply non-violent communication strategy.	2.95	0.98	Agree
12.	Non-violent communication strategy helps me manage my emotions better in conflict situations.	2.81	0.92	Agree
	Grand Mean	**2.96**	**1.20**	**Agree**

Table 3 shows that items No. 9 – 12 had the following mean scores of 3.07, 3.01, 2.95 and 2.81 with their corresponding standard deviations of 0.93, 1.21, 0.98 and 0.92. Mean scores for items 9 and 10 indicates Strongly Agree while items 11 – 12 indicates Agreed. However, the grand mean of 2.96 with its standard deviation of 1.20 implies that respondents agreed to all the item statements made in research question three. To conclude therefore, the result of the above analysis reveals that respondents agreed that nonviolent communication is a very effective strategy in counselling-based conflict resolution.

Discussion of Findings

The results are discussed in line with the research questions, incorporating insights from recent and related studies.

The findings of the study on Table 1 show that peer mediation is an effective strategy on conflict resolution among secondary school students. This is in line with Alan Cansu (2016), who in his study observed that students who have taken part in peer mediation try to resolve conflict in a more constructive manner rather than relying on school authority, they are more self-controlled, they can give non-discriminative decisions and have shown a positive development in various other areas. Still in agreement with the result of the study, Taştan (2004), maintained that in schools where students have been given peer mediation training, there has been a decline in conflict issues among students. Overall, peer mediation is a valuable strategy for resolving interpersonal conflicts among adolescent students, promoting a positive school climate and fostering social-emotional learning.

The result of the study on table 2 shows that non-verbal cues and active listening are very effective counselling-based conflict resolution strategies. This aligns with Yuangang (2022) who

asserts that building relationship is paramount to ensuring effective communication and collaboration among students. By teaching students active listening strategy, educators can empower them to navigate conflicts constructively and foster a positive learning environment.

This agrees with Paramole, et al (2024), who averred that active listening involves the speaker processing their message and responding thoughtfully. Thus, active listening promotes clear and respectful communication which is essential for resolving conflict effectively, helping students understand different perspectives and develop empathy leading to more constructive conflict resolution.

The findings of the study on table 3 shows that the students perceived nonviolent communication conflict resolution strategy as very effective in conflict resolution among senior secondary school students. This aligns with the findings of Dzaferovic (2018), and Rosenberg (2006), who asserts that nonviolent communication (NVC) modifies the relationship between parents and children, teachers and students, and even the way one treats himself. Rosenberg (2006), in his assertion maintained that the goal of the process of nonviolent communication is to have people clearly and compassionately listen to one another, so that they can clearly perceive their own need as well as the needs of others, and communicate their needs in such a manner that others want to keep them.

However, from the result of findings, all the three counselling-based conflict resolution strategies were perceived to be effective by senior secondary school students in resolving conflict, with nonviolent communication strongly perceived as the most effective followed by peer mediation and active listening respectively. This goes to showcase that nonviolent communication has been perceived to enhance greater conflict resolution skills, promoting more effective and peaceful communication.

Conclusion

The study concluded that all the three counselling-based conflict resolution strategies (peer mediation, active listening and nonviolent communication) are perceived to be effective in promoting peaceful coexistence and effective conflict resolution among senior secondary school students, with nonviolent communication perceived to be most effective, followed by peer mediation and active listening respectively. This study's findings have implications for educators, policy makers and counsellors seeking to promote positive relationships and academic performance among students.

Recommendations

Educators and policy makers should consider incorporating counselling-based conflict resolution strategies into school curricula.

Counsellors should provide training and support to students on effective conflict resolution skills.

Implementing peer-mediation, active listening and nonviolent communication in conflict resolution programmes, should be an effective strategy in curbing violence presently experienced in most secondary schools as a means of resolving conflicts.

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ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COUNSELLING INTERVENTIONS STRATEGIES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES APPLIED BY COUNSELLORS IN LAGOS STATE SECONDARY

SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Conflicts that range from peer disputes to internal emotional struggles are common experiences during adolescents' development, which are often worsened by social, psychological and academic pressures. School counsellors play a vital role in guiding adolescent through these challenges using various intervention strategies. This research examined the relationship between counselling interventions and the conflict resolution styles adopted by counsellors working with adolescents in secondary schools. Specifically, it investigated how techniques such as mediation, cognitive-behavioral therapy, empathy, and emotional regulation influence the choice of conflict resolution strategies. Guided by two research questions and one hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance, the study adopted a correlational survey design. Data were collected from 234 school counselling cases across 24 selected secondary schools Lagos State using stratified and simple random sampling. Data were examined using visual descriptors, mean score and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Findings revealed that collaborative and compromising conflict resolution styles were the most commonly used. Mediation and empathy-based interventions were also frequently employed counselling interventions. A statistically significant but weak positive correlation ($r = 0.191$, $p < 0.05$) was found between the counselling interventions and conflict resolution styles adopted. These results suggest that effective counselling practices contribute to more constructive conflict resolution among adolescents. The study underscoring the need for comprehensive training and consistent implementation of evidence-based interventions in school counselling programmes to support adolescent development and foster a harmonious school environment.

Keywords: Counselling Interventions, Conflict Resolution Styles, Adolescents, Secondary Schools, School Counsellors

Introduction

Conflict can be described as a natural and an inevitable and enduring aspect of human interaction and existence. It arises wherever people live, work, and interact with one another. Also,

when goals, interests or values become incompatible (Thakore, 2013). He further stated that conflict can be described as a misunderstanding or clash that occurs when one group seeks to have its perspectives or interests accepted over another's. These clashes may stem from differences in beliefs, goals, values, or communication styles and can manifest in various forms, such as verbal disagreements, emotional tension, or physical confrontations. At its core, conflict reflects the fundamental reality of human diversity and the challenge of navigating competing needs within relationships and social structures.

Conflict resolution refers to the structured processes employed to address disputes, restore harmony, and promote understanding. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) developed one of the most widely recognized models for understanding conflict management. Their model outlines five conflict resolution styles: Avoiding, Accommodating, Competing, Compromising, and Collaborating. These styles use by counsellors may vary in terms of assertiveness and cooperativeness and could be applied differently based on context of counselling need at the moment, personality of the adolescent, and learned behaviour. Among adolescents, these styles often emerge as instinctive responses which are shaped by upbringing, peer influence, and emotional maturity (Rahim, 2002).

Adolescents, in particular, face a unique set of developmental, emotional, and social challenges that make them especially vulnerable to conflict. Erikson's psychosocial theory (1968) identifies the period as the stage of "identity vs. role confusion stage of life, marked by puberty, identity formation, increased peer interaction, and the quest for autonomy, is often characterized by heightened emotional reactivity, risk-taking behavior, and interpersonal struggles. As Reddy and Devi (2018) noted, conflict resolution during adolescence is a critical skill linked to emotional regulation, peer relationships, and long-term psychosocial outcomes. When adolescents fail to learn effective conflict resolution techniques during adolescence that could be linked to poor mental health outcomes, strained relationships, and antisocial behavior in adulthood (Papalia et al., 2006). It is widely observed that school counselling services often involve group sessions, peer mediation programs, or individual therapy, all of which have shown promise in enhancing interpersonal relationships and reducing aggressive behavior (Okoye, 2014). Counsellors, by modeling and teaching constructive conflict resolution, become agents of positive social development.

While conflict is inevitable, the way individuals choose to manage it plays a significant role in determining whether it leads to growth or harm. Resolution of conflict could be seen as the methods and strategies used to address disagreements and restore harmony in relationships. It involves communication skills such as active listening, negotiation, empathy, reframing, compromise, and problem-solving. Adolescents typically adopt a range of conflict resolution

styles, including avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising, and collaborating (Deutsch, et.al. 2011). Each style reflects different levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness and carries unique implications for relationship dynamics and emotional outcomes. For example,

collaboration and compromise are generally seen as constructive, while avoidance and aggression may escalate tensions or leave issues unresolved.

Several empirical studies support the efficacy of counselling in shaping adolescents' conflict resolution styles. Pam (2023) found that the use of non-violent communication in counselling interventions contributed to improved relationships and fewer instances of physical or verbal aggression among secondary school students. Similarly, Adanna and Olumide (2023) observed that adolescents who participated in peer mediation and emotional regulation workshops displayed a greater tendency to use compromise and collaboration rather than confrontation.

In a study conducted in Nigerian tertiary institutions, Etele and Akunna (2023) reported that conflict was often managed through avoidance, indicating the need for more active and skill-based counselling interventions. Their findings suggest that while counselling services may exist, their content and delivery may not sufficiently address the real-world interpersonal conflicts experienced by adolescents and young adults.

Counselling interventions serve as a critical support mechanism for adolescents, particularly in school and community settings where structured support systems exist. Counsellors are professionally trained to help young people navigate emotional challenges, resolve interpersonal problems, and develop effective communication and coping strategies. Through techniques such as active listening, emotional validation, non-violent communication, and empathy-based engagement, counsellors create safe spaces for adolescents to explore their emotions and conflicts. As George (2016) and Tustonja et al. (2024) emphasize, professional counselling not only facilitates conflict resolution but also strengthens emotional intelligence, improves interpersonal communication, and fosters resilience.

Despite the established role of counselling in supporting adolescents, we still have a significant space in empirical research with regard to the effectiveness of specific counselling interventions in shaping adolescents' preferred conflict resolution styles. In many school systems, counselling services are available, yet adolescents continue to exhibit maladaptive conflict behaviours such as avoidance, confrontation, or passive aggression. This raises important questions: Are current counselling approaches adequately tailored to adolescent developmental needs? Do these interventions effectively foster constructive conflict resolution behaviors such as collaboration and compromise? Or are adolescents still relying on dysfunctional styles due to gaps in the implementation or quality of counselling services?

This research problem became particularly urgent in today's society, where adolescents face complex interpersonal pressures—from peer competition and academic stress to social media influences and family instability. Many adolescents navigate these conflicts without sufficient

guidance, and when their coping mechanisms fail, the outcomes may include broken relationships, disciplinary issues, mental health challenges, or even violence. Although the theoretical and practical potential of counselling is well-recognized, its real-world impact on conflict resolution

among adolescents remains underexplored and under-documented, particularly in the Nigerian context where cultural, institutional, and resource-related factors may affect counselling outcomes.

Furthermore, current literature lacks a comprehensive analysis of how specific counselling methods - such as cognitive-behavioral strategies, mediation, anger and emotional regulation training, empathy, validation and restorative dialogue influence adolescents' tendencies toward particular conflict resolution styles. Without this understanding, it is difficult for counsellors, educators, and policymakers to tailor interventions that are both effective and contextually appropriate. Existing studies often generalize counselling as a single construct, without distinguishing the type, depth, or delivery method of interventions, nor do they examine adolescents' post-intervention behavioral patterns in conflict situations.

Given these concerns, there is a compelling need to investigate the relationship between counselling interventions and the conflict resolution styles adopted by adolescents. This research sought to add to this critical space by investigating whether, and to what extent, exposure to structured counselling leads to healthier conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, it aimed to determine if counsellors who administer counselling are more likely to adopt constructive styles such as collaboration, compromise, accommodating and competing strategies, rather than maladaptive styles such as avoidance, aggression, or dominance. In doing so, the study also sought to inform best practices in counselling delivery, enhance programme design in schools and youth centers, and contribute to the development of policies that promote emotional well-being and peaceful coexistence among adolescents.

By focusing on this relationship, the study addresses an important intersection of educational psychology, developmental guidance, and conflict management. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations that will support counsellors in refining their approaches, enable schools to integrate more effective psychosocial support mechanisms, and guide policymakers in developing youth-focused strategies for social harmony. Ultimately, the research aspires to promote healthier adolescent development by ensuring that counselling interventions not only reach young people but also empower them with the tools to manage conflict in constructive, emotionally intelligent ways.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the common conflict resolution styles used by adolescents?
2. What counselling interventions are commonly applied to adolescents experiencing conflict?

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

♦ There is no significant relationship between counselling interventions strategies and conflict resolution styles adopted by counsellors in secondary schools in Lagos State.

Methodology

Design

1. The **correlational survey design** was employed by the study to examine the relationship between counsellors interventions and conflict resolution styles for adolescents.

Population and Sample

The targeted population comprised of counsellors in secondary schools who manage adolescents in public schools within Lagos State. A sample of 24 counsellors with 234 counselling occurrences were obtained using simple random sampling and purposive sampling. The six Educational District were adopted as strata while simple random sampling was used to select four schools in each of the district. This gave a total of 24 schools selected and a counsellor was selected in each of the schools to make 24 counsellors.

Table 1: *Counsellors selected across the six educational districts in Lagos State*

Educational District	No. of Counsellor	Cases
I	4	39
II	4	38
III	4	42
IV	4	40
V	4	35
VI	4	40
Total	24	234

The distribution in Table 1 shows the number of counsellors selected across Lagos state and the number of 234 recorded counselling cases within the 2024/2025 academic session.

An instrument titled the Counselling Interventions and Conflict Resolution Scale (CICRS) was developed and designed to gather data for this research. The scale consists of three sections. The first section gathered the biodata of the students whose counselling cases were reviewed. Of the sampled participants, 44% were between the age range of 12-15 years, while 56% fell within the age range of 16-19 years. In terms of gender, 76% of the selected cases involved female

participants, while 24% involved male students. Additionally, 53% of the selected cases were drawn from junior secondary schools whereas 47% were selected from the senior secondary

schools. The second section gathered information on conflict resolution styles employed by school counsellors. It comprised five subsections, each representing a conflict resolution style: *Accommodating, Avoiding, Collaborative, Competing, and Compromising*. The third section focused on the counselling intervention strategies adopted by counsellors. This section included five domains, also with five statement each: *Anger & Emotional Regulation Training, Empathy & Validation, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Mediation and Restorative Dialogue strategies*. A five-point rating scale was used for both sections two and three, with response options ranging from 1 = *Never*, 2 = *Rarely*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 4 = *Often* and 5 = *Always*.

In order to ascertain the reliability of the CICRS, the instrument was tested in a school that was not part of the main study. To ascertain a it's stability, a test-retest method was used. The CICRS was administered twice to the respondents with an interval of two weeks between the first and second administration. A reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained, indicating a high level of stability and confirming the instrument suitability for use in the main study. During the main study, data were collected through the counsellors in the selected secondary schools, using their documented counselling cases. The collated data were analyzed using visual representations, such as bar chart, mean score and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance to determine the statistical relationship between counselling intervention and conflict resolution styles.

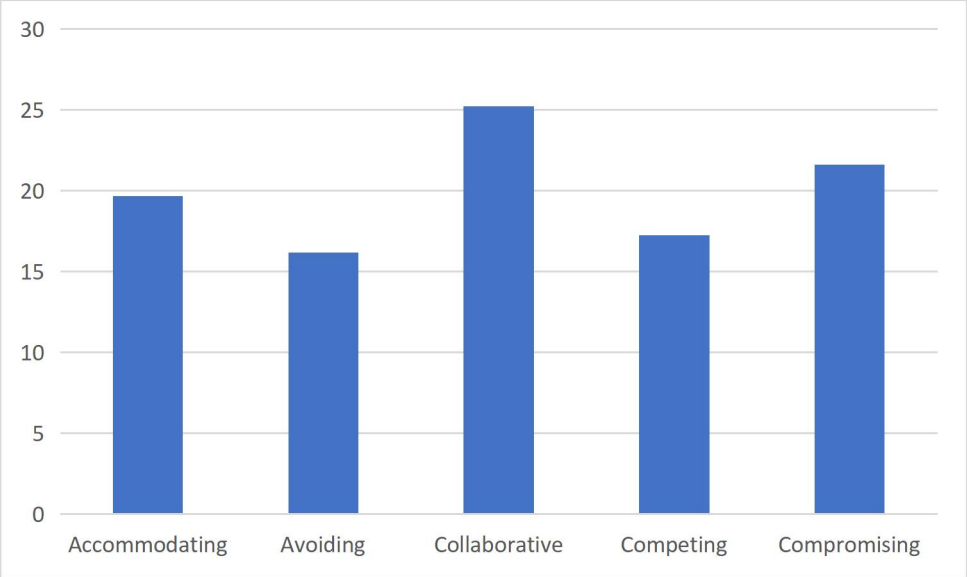
Results

Research question 1: What are the common conflict resolution styles used by counsellors?

Table 1: *Description on Conflict Resolutions Styles adopted by Counsellors*

Conflict Resolution	Frequency of Usage	Percentage
Accommodating	3679	20
Avoiding	3025	16
Collaborative	4712	25
Competing	3227	17
Compromising	4036	22
Total	18679	100

Figure 1: Conflict Resolution Styles used by Counsellors



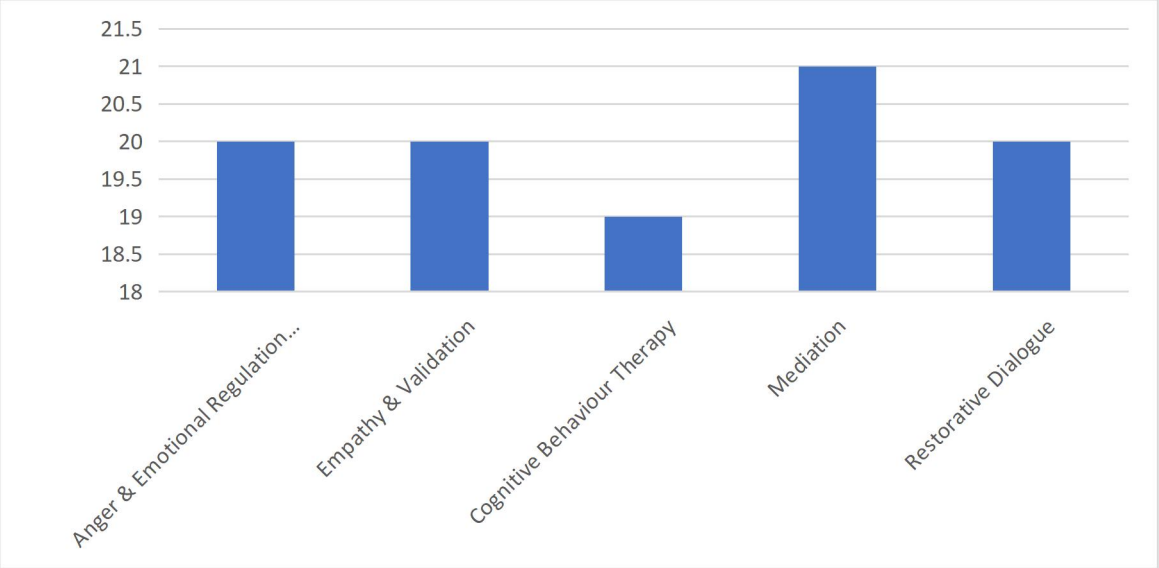
The results presented in Figure 1 indicate that 25% of the counsellors adopt collaborative conflict resolution styles, 22% use compromising styles, 20% prefer accommodating styles, and 17% employ competing styles. The remaining 16% adopt avoiding conflict resolution styles. Accordingly, the collaborative style is the most commonly used, with the highest adoption rate of 25%.

Research question 2: What counselling interventions are commonly applied to adolescents experiencing conflict?

Table 2: *Description on Counselling Interventions Strategies adopted by Counsellors*

Counselling Interventions	Frequency of Usage	Percentage
Anger & Emotional Regulation Training	4848	20
Empathy & Validation	5029	20
Cognitive Behaviour Therapy	4775	19
Mediation	5057	21
Restorative Dialogue	4836	20
Total	24545	100

Figure 1: Counselling Intervention Strategies used by Counsellors



Observations from Figure 2 reveal that mediation counselling intervention strategies are the most frequently utilized, accounting for 21%. Additionally, Anger and Emotional Regulation Training, Empathy and Validation Training, and Restorative Dialogue each have a usage rate of 20%. Furthermore, 19% of counsellors employ Cognitive Behavioural Therapy during their interactions with students. These findings indicate that mediation counselling strategies are the predominant approach among counsellors in their engagement with students in Lagos State.

Hypothesis 1: Between counselling interventions strategies and conflict resolution styles adopted by counsellors in secondary schools in Lagos State, no significant relationship exist.

Table 3: *Correlation of counselling interventions strategies and conflict resolution styles*

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	r-cal	Sig.
Counselling Interventions Strategies	234	104.89	14.02	232	0.191	0.003
Conflict Resolution Styles	234	79.82	12.44			

Table 3 reveals a mean score of 104.89 for counselling interventions strategies and 79.82 for conflict resolution styles. The correlation coefficient of 0.191 ($p < 0.05$) indicates a positive relationship between the two variables, suggesting that higher conflict resolution styles associated with improved counselling interventions strategies, and vice versa. Furthermore, since the correlation coefficient (0.191) exceeds the critical value of 0.195 ($\alpha = 0.05$, $df = 232$), the

relationship is statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the study

concludes that significant relationship between counselling interventions strategies and conflict resolution styles adopted by counsellors in secondary schools in Lagos State.

Discussion of Findings

The research observe that the collaborative conflict resolution style (25%) is the most frequently adopted style by school counsellors in Lagos State. This is followed by the compromising (22%) and accommodating (20%). This may have suggested that the adoption of conflict resolution strategies promotes mutual understanding, cooperation, and shared problem-solving. This outcome aligns with the report of Fajinmi and Oloyede (2025), who noted that collaborative styles is ideal for team building, promoting collaboration, and managing diverse perspectives. Similarly, Adham (2023) identified effective conflict resolution rely on understanding cultural and emotional differences, fostering a cooperative team environment, providing constructive feedback, practicing effective communication and relationship-building

The study observed that mediation counselling intervention strategy is the most frequently used which is closely followed by Anger and Emotional Regulation Training, Empathy and Validation Training and Restorative Dialogue. The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is the least preferred counselling therapy. This shows that counsellors prefer opting for collaborative conflict resolution, emotional self-regulation, and the development of empathy among students, which are critical for managing adolescent behavioural challenges in educational settings. The outcome corroborates the Ugwoke et al. (2020) report on the effective use of mediation in school counselling. The researchers emphasized the potency of the counselling intervention in peaceful resolution of interpersonal conflicts among adolescents and promotes a climate of mutual respect. Likewise, empathy-building interventions were encouraged as an intervention in stemming bullying and improving peer relationships in Nigerian secondary schools (Aluede, 2018). Adeoye and Olutayo (2019) in their own study reported that emotional regulation training significantly improved students' ability to manage anger and impulsive reactions, especially in high-conflict school environments.

In addition, the study noted a significant positive relationship between counselling intervention strategies and the conflict resolution styles adopted by counsellors in secondary schools in Lagos State. This shows that counselling approaches employed by school counsellors have a direct influence on how conflicts are managed and resolved within the school environment. The outcome of the study suggests that the employment of more effective counselling intervention by counsellors will likely resolve interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts among students. The study's outcome aligns with earlier research findings. The study of Eze and Okonkwo (2020) observed a strong positive relationship between the adoption of mediation-based counselling strategies and improved student behaviour and conflict resolution outcomes, especially in urban secondary schools. The researchers recommended the use of structured counselling interventions

in reducing tensions and encourage dialogue among quarreling students. Likewise, counselling strategies such as cognitive-behavioral interventions and emotional regulation training significantly enhance the conflict resolution competencies of school counsellors, especially in

adolescent-focused environments (Onukwufor & Oyekanmi, 2018). The study of Adebayo and Olanrewaju (2019) observed that counsellors who utilized a combination of affective (e.g., empathy training) and behavioral (e.g., anger management) interventions were more likely to adopt collaborative conflict resolution styles, which promote long-term interpersonal harmony. This shows that the type of counselling strategy significantly induce the conflict resolution styles employed by school counsellors.

Conclusion

This research investigated the relationship between counselling interventions and conflict resolution styles among counsellors in secondary schools in Lagos State. Findings show that counsellors predominantly adopt collaborative and compromising conflict resolution styles, which reflect a commitment to fostering mutual understanding and cooperative problem-solving among students.

Furthermore, counsellors apply a variety of intervention strategies, with mediation, empathy and validation, emotional regulation training, restorative dialogue, and CBT being the most frequently used. These approaches indicate a balanced application of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral techniques to support adolescents in managing conflicts.

A statistically significant positive correlation between counselling interventions and conflict resolution styles was established, indicating that counsellors who apply effective interventions are more likely to use constructive and adaptive resolution methods. This underscores the importance of equipping school counsellors with the right tools and training to foster peaceful school environments and promote adolescents' interpersonal development.

Recommendations

1. Counsellors should be exposed to regular and modern-day training and workshops to increase both intervention and conflict resolution skills for continuous capacity Building for
2. In other to better manage adolescent conflict, emotional Intelligence Training which incorporates self-regulation and empathy should be integrated in training to enhance counsellors' abilities
3. Counsellors should continue to prioritize student-focused techniques like restorative dialogue and empathy-based interventions that promote trust and open communication. 4. Schools should promote the use of well-researched methods such as CBT and mediation, ensuring that counsellors are trained to apply them appropriately in school settings.

5. Education authorities should provide clear policy frameworks that support conflict resolution through counselling, including the provision of resources, guidelines, and time allocation for effective counselling practices.

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN COUNSELLING:A PANACEA TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ORGANISATIONS IN LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in effective counselling and conflict resolution. This study explored the interplay between Emotional intelligence and counselling in resolving conflicts in organisationsin Lagos State, using a Systematic review approach to highlight how emotionally intelligent professional counsellors can foster a conducive environment where there is an understanding of conflict and its resolution. Through the analysis of the components of Emotional intelligence, which are: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. This study brings to fore the importance in navigating and properly handling conflicts. The findings suggest that the application of Emotional intelligence by counsellors in their practice will help them to engage in constructive and effective discourse, capable of managing emotions, and enhancing collaborative problem-solving skills among the conflicting individuals or groups. Ultimately, applying Emotional intelligence in counselling practices promotes better conflict resolution outcomes, thereby making way for healthier interpersonal relationships in organisations and our societies as a whole.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Counselling, Conflict resolution, Organisations.

Introduction

Conflict has remained a major component of every growing human society. It is an indispensable tool for growth and development in almost every society worldwide when adequately addressed, including Nigeria (Olatunji, 2020). Effective conflict resolution in the global space has also become a catalyst for fostering innovations and advancing a cause for a stronger society (Uzochukwu et al., 2016). Conflicts are almost unavoidable in every facet of life, and remains innate among human being generally within the context of social interactions.

Conflicts are bound to take place in school systems due to interactions with individuals around us, this also makes conflict inevitable, owing to our diverse upbringing (Karimova, 2015). Due to the concept of individual differences interplay existing in human beings and their behaviour, conflict

may arise, and this is dependent on the different psychological dispositions of individuals generally. Some of these psychological dispositions may include: home background, environment, personalities and temperament etc.

Due to the nature of conflicts, it is also noted that conflicts are both vertical and horizontal; the vertical has its origin in several authorities of workers or staff in organisations where there are superiors and average staff, thereby resulting in an unhealthy rivalry between the two categories of staff. From a review, the horizontal is explained as a form of conflict arising among individuals having the same anchor (Jolly, Kong & Kim, 2021).As earlier mentioned, conflict within these lines occur due to different work tasks or positions, besides, conflict arises on the ground of varied cultural beliefs. Often they can occur because of different positions and work tasks. Also, conflicts could arise as a result of different cultural beliefs, ethical options, value conflicts, and intellectual differentiations and prejudices (Rahim, 2023).

The nature of human beings have been characterized to be innately selfish, with individualistic and conflictive tendencies in different groups in societies in the course of pursuing their personal interests. In the face of current economic downturn, several rooms for conflict have arisen, with some gearing towards violence (Itumo, 2019).Resolving conflicts when the need arises, requires corresponding skills from all concerned, especially the Counsellor. It is also expedient to have an understanding of conflict and the types of conflicts that takes place within a group or organizations so as to know how emotional intelligence can be incorporated in the course of counselling to resolve conflicts. Conflict may be described as an antagonistic sharp disagreement between people, it could also be referred to as a form of discord between individuals and groups due to diverse perceptions in the opposition of needs, values and concerns, which may be within an individual or between two or more people. These leads us to the several forms of conflicts.

Theory of conflict resolution propounded by Lederach (1998) focuses on transformation, which emphasises a holistic and relational view of settling disputes, especially in a more serious situation. Lederach (1998) advocates the need for transforming the primary dynamics of conflict, which include relationships, systems and cultural norms. By doing this, there would be an understanding of the history and the possible desired end, and work out change processes to achieving the desired end. Lederach (1998) emphasised that this is more crucial to resolving conflict than mainly focusing on resolving immediate issues. This theory gives an insight to the fact that conflict does not arise accidentally, rather, it must have started at a point before it becomes protracted. Amongst the concepts in the theory are:

Conflict transformation: This focuses on presenting issues that is capable of transforming the fundamental processes of the conflict, its causes, and getting to its root.

Peace building Pyramid: This talks about the various levels of people involved in conflict and the appropriate steps for them all, these levels are: the top leadership, middle-range leadership, and grass root leadership.

Moral Imagination: this emphasises on applying creative approaches, and working out possibility for a change and new social realities in the conflicting scenarios

Insider Partiality: This also explains that there are individuals in the conflict network that can be important source for building trust, link and connection in resolving the conflict.

Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace: This emphasises on the relatedness of all the elements in arriving at peaceful resolution, and recognizing the need for fairness while ensuring forgiveness and compassion.

Holistic Approach: this emphasises on comprehensive approach, considering the social, psychological, and structural scope of conflicts as affected in the population.

Types of conflicts

From several reviews, it was established that there are several forms of conflict that takes place among a group of people or organizations (Basogul & Ozgur, 2016; Bélanger et al., 2015, Winardi et al., 2021).

They are typically Intra-personal conflict, Inter-personal conflict, Group conflict, Intra-state conflict, International conflict and there are differences in these conflict types.

Intra personal conflict takes place within an individual. It is a battle within oneself, it is a self-determined rift against oneself, and in most cases being an internal rift, and it most times results into personal frustration which is capable of being transferred to other people under aggression, this most times happen in the process of making crucial choices on pertinent issues.

Interpersonal conflict is very common among different age groups of people in communities, workplaces or associations, in inter personal conflict, two or more individuals could have a disagreement over an issue, and when a common ground cannot be reached, this could linger for long. It may be between two or more factions of groups and cliques. Interpersonal conflicts also arises in our different homes, and when this is not adequately addressed, it can be transmitted to other spheres of relationships which includes work organisations (Bélanger et al., 2015).

Intra-group conflict can also be described as disagreement among a small group of individuals within the same boundary, eg coworkers, and superiors, and employees and management (leadership) in organizations (Basogul & Ozgur, 2016; Winardi et al., 2021).

Intergroup conflict takes place between a larger number of people in a group from different work group or unfamiliar boundaries. Intergroup conflict is also termed with disagreements or clashes amongst two or more groups and their members. It often shows up in the form of psychological tension or physical violence, and this may come up within organization, diverse groups from formal and informal structures. Intergroup conflicts are mainly caused by

incompatibilities, behaviours and sentiments in different organisations (Halevy & Cohen, 2019).Within the confines of intergroup, there could be an experience of horizontal conflict, this is a conflict with individuals within the same peer level; also, the vertical conflict, which is a

conflict between a manager and his subordinate (Halevy & Cohen, 2019).

It has been established from studies on causes and resolution of conflict from organizational conflict theorist, that conflicts in most times are detrimental to organizational growth and functioning, conflict in organisations is a counterproductive force capable of inhibiting organizational growth and development. Caputo et al. (2019) established in the conflict management study conducted between 2007 and 2017 that conflict management typically emphasised on topics, like gender, emotion, negotiation skills, cultural style of resolving conflicts etc. regardless of the dysfunctional nature of conflict, itcan be reasonably resolved through negotiations and adaptation (Nair, 2008).

It has also been established from studies how conflict can bring about changes, innovation and development in institutions or societies (Jolly et al., 2021). The basic component of such changes are anchored on the two categories of conflict, this categories are the Functional and the Dysfunctional.

Functional conflict can produce new ideas that are capable of being applied in problem solving situations, whereas dysfunctional conflicts are opposite in nature to functional conflict. This kind of conflict in most times are characterized as being capable of disruptive actions and lacks cooperation, thereby bringing disunity to a group of individuals or organisations (Rahim, 2023).

It must also be recognized that the place of counselling in conflict resolution cannot be overemphasized. Counsellors have been adequately equipped with the control and management of conflicts when they arise through effective counselling skills and a well-grounded sense of high level of interpersonal skills. In every social group, there are different individuals with different ideology and reasoning, these individual attributes make them to be easily susceptible to conflict, because these features mentioned above makes them incompatible in their goals and aspirations, and in the course of working towards the achievement of their different goals, different individuals may unavoidably step on each other's toe or cross each other's part. In organisations where there are no clearly stated rules for achieving organizational goals and objectives, conflict will arise due to responsibility overlaps amongst staff members, this may lead to differences in the feelings and viewpoints of these individuals, most times where the available resources are limited also. The emotional intelligence of the counsellor in this situation becomes a very useful tool to manage and control the situation of outburst of unhealthy behaviours leading to conflicts. Effective counselling in resolving conflict requires a high level of emotional intelligence (Aguilar, 2021).

Emotional intelligence has further been described as a tool useful in managing organizational

conflict effectively. Every effective leadership makes the most use of emotional intelligence in order to combat daily organizational task and conflict as they may arise. Emotional intelligence has remained a subject of more concern and attention to researchers. The theory of Emotional

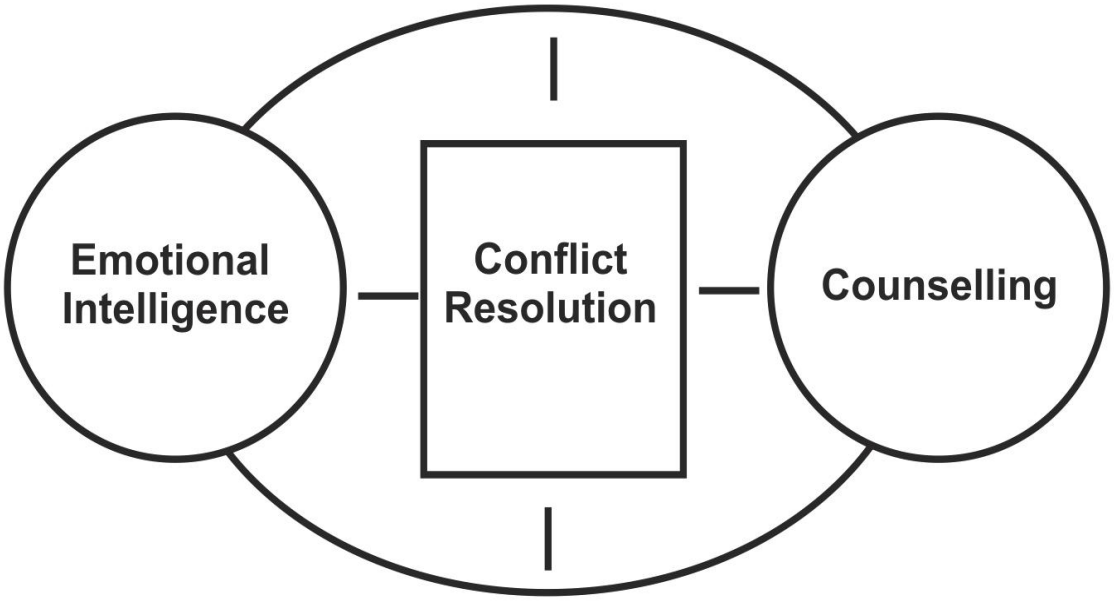
intelligence as developed by Thorndike evolved around Social Intelligence, which was termed as the ability to manage human beings and have a deeper understanding in their different genders. This was later expanded by Gardener, and the model of explaining emotional intelligence by Gardner (1993) evolved from the theory of multiple intelligence. The internal and social intelligence dimensions from the theory of multiple intelligence was used to conceptualize emotional intelligence (Gardner, 2011). Emotional intelligence has five dimensions of capabilities, the dimensions are: Self-awareness (awareness of individuals' personal emotions); Self-regulation (ability to manage emotions individually); Empathy (understanding other peoples' feelings);Social skills (individual's ability to motivate themselves, and establishing interpersonal relationship skills at every giving time). Emotional intelligence was further explained as the ability to monitor and control one's feelings and that of others, in which such feelings are used as a guide to the thoughts and actions of others. Studies have shown that Emotional intelligence has been termed as important as cognition (Poon Teng, 2002).

It is essential that an individual must be aware of his or her emotions. The possibility of an individual to identify his emotions makes it possible for him to understand his effect on thoughts and the corresponding motivations behind his behaviour. This makes it possible for individuals to manage their emotions effectively and exhibit adaptive behaviour in unpleasant situations. Emotional intelligence contains some personality traits such as showing optimism, assertiveness and being empathetic about others (Chung et al., 2023)Individuals with high degree of emotional intelligence can easily take note of emotions as people talk, in the pitch or tone of their voices, including body languages, gestures, and apply empathy. Notably, individuals who understand others and has ability to manage his emotions can constructively handle and resolve conflicts (Nzomo, 2018; Jordan & Troth, 2021).

Within this context, emotional intelligence can be ascertained as a critical tool for counselling skills of psychological counsellors. It is expected for every leader in organisations to be equipped with an intuitive ability to identify the emotions and feelings of others in an organization, and respond appropriately. But where this fails, there is a need for a counselling intervention through a professional counsellor who adequately possesses a measure of conflict resolution skills, with the understanding of people's emotion. The application of emotional intelligence has remained a necessary skill for counsellors in resolving conflicts of any form within an organization nationwide.

Counselling as a helping profession helps individuals to discover themselves and, making necessary adjustment where necessary, thereby helping them to be well equipped and integrated into the society, and becoming useful to themselves and significant others (Corey, 2013). Many

leaders and managers need to engage more counsellors in their organisations, which is crucial for healthy work relationship and managing outburst of behaviours that may lead to conflict and resolving conflict in organisations when it arises.



Conceptual framework

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and counselling in conflict resolution in organisations in Lagos State.

The problem of the study came out from the introduction of this study on how organisations and individuals have had conflicts in workplaces and at different groups. Most of these conflicts have been linked to work related conflicts, especially in the process of discharging of duties and in the course of aspiring for organizational growth. It has been understood by a few number of people that conflict is a tool that can influence growth and progress positively and negatively in organisations, but when this is adequately handled and resolved, it may in turn bring a turnaround effect on organizational growth and development. It has also been discovered that a few studies on emotional intelligence has been done, but without the inclusion of counselling. To this end, this study becomes important in a time like this, when conflict has become the order of the day, and to proffer possible ways of resolving conflicts effectively through emotional intelligence and counselling.

As earlier mentioned that, most of the studies conducted on emotional intelligence were carried out in educational institutions, homes and other organisations, but not accompanied with counselling (Aguilar, 2021; Jolly et al, 2021; Jordan & Troth, 2021; Poon Teng, 2002, Chang et al., 2023; Rahim, 2023). Invariably, different organisations have different levels and history of

conflicts, and with different degree of its escalation (Poitras, 2012). From these studies, it was found that emotional intelligence has a significant relationship with conflict resolution. The use of emotional intelligence in administering conflict resolution to issues in organisations reduced

interpersonal relationship conflict and stress that is commonly associated with organisations at different levels (Hopkins & Yonker, 2015).

The study of Rahim and Psenicka (2002) on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution were conducted in seven different countries around America, Asia, Africa and Europe, these countries include: the United States of America, China, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Macau, Greece, Portugal and South Africa. From these array of studies, it was established and found that emotional intelligence is significantly linked with conflict resolution strategies, which implies that individuals in different organisations go about their own concerns and others in resolving conflicts. The conduct of this reviewed studies made it profound that emotional intelligence in conflict resolution follows the same trend world over.

In work related environment, emotionally intelligent members of staff experience a more stable lifestyle, with little or low level of conflict, which is capable of promoting a reasonable measure of peace of mind. This inadvertently promotes good and cordial relationship among members of staff and capable of fostering greater understanding in their emotions. In a similar vein, managers with high level of emotional intelligence are able to manage and resolve conflicts, and thereby reducing the impact of negative effect of conflict in work places and homes (Ayoko & Konrad, 2012). Studies (Badejo & Gandonu, 2021; Schlaerth et al., 2013; Shih and Susanto, 2010, Zhang et al., 2015)also established that emotional intelligence is strongly correlated with conflict resolution and building team morale.

Due to the irrationality in human behaviours and emotions in our different world of works, many conflicts have broken out of this, but with the application of emotional intelligence, emotions and reasoning are understood for problems to be resolved. Different studies have shown that high degree of emotional intelligence in work places have proven a better predictor of better work relationship in organisations, and with a minimal probable level of conflicts in organisations (Choi et al., 2019; Wen et al., 2019). Apparently, where this is achieved, there is a relatively higher and better level of service and performances, with a high quality of conflict management.

As earlier mentioned that a few studies were done in EI and counselling in conflict resolution, yet the existing few studies are not comprehensive enough, particularly when linked to the theoretical frameworks, where different methodology applied had impacted the reliability of study findings.

Models of Emotional Intelligence

Carusol et al., (2015)established EI as a mental ability; therefore measuring the level of an individual's emotional intelligence requires an ability test, which includes the use of emotional intelligence Scale by Carmeli et al. (2003), The WEIS self-report measure of EI, which consists

of four different orientations, such as :Self appraisal and expression of emotion, appraisal and identification of emotion in other people, self-regulation of emotion by individuals and facilitating

performance through emotion. These measurement scales were not without flaws, especially with the Self-report scale, which was considered possible for test administrator to feign positive attitudes for a desirable positive response, making the measures to overlap with personality measures (Prentice, 2019).

Table on Scales of measurement applied in the 29 studies on emotional intelligence examined in this work.

Table 1: *EI measurement.*

WLEIS	7
EQ-i	4
WEIP	3
MSCEIT	2
ECI-U	1
EI Scale Scutte	1
EIAI	1
Other scale	2

Methodology

Based on these inadequacies, a systematic review was used in this study. This is due to its explicitness, reproducibility, and comprehension. In addition, systematic review makes it possible to explore current and evolving trends in different fields, this also gives room for mapping boundaries on known ideas, and identifying existing gaps in relevant literature, and check possible occurrence of potential bias through narrative analysis (Pickering & Byrne, 2013; Pickering et al., 2014; Roy et al., 2012). The application of systematic review in this study was done within conflict resolution and emotional intelligence in counselling to identify gaps through the major aim of this study, which is: To establish the relationship between emotional intelligence and counselling in conflict resolution in organisations.

Studies on Emotional intelligence were identified applying electronic databases, which includes APA Psyc Articles, Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, Scopus, and Sage. Additional information were sourced through other grey literature for quality and accuracy. The searches were conducted between March and June 2025. Keywords used in this search included “emotional intelligence”, “conflict”, “conflict management”, “conflict resolutions”, counselling and “organisation”.

The study selection was done using the PRISMA statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analysis). This was used as a guide to systematic review (Moher et al., 2009).Only original studies on Emotional Intelligence and conflict resolution published in academic journals were included in the review. Evidence from these countries were reviewed and

recorded, namely: Afghanistan, Australia, China, Canada, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Turkey, UK and USA. The papers reviewed were

quantitative and qualitative in nature. While Emotional Intelligence was measured using the Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profile-short version (WEIP-S), and Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI).

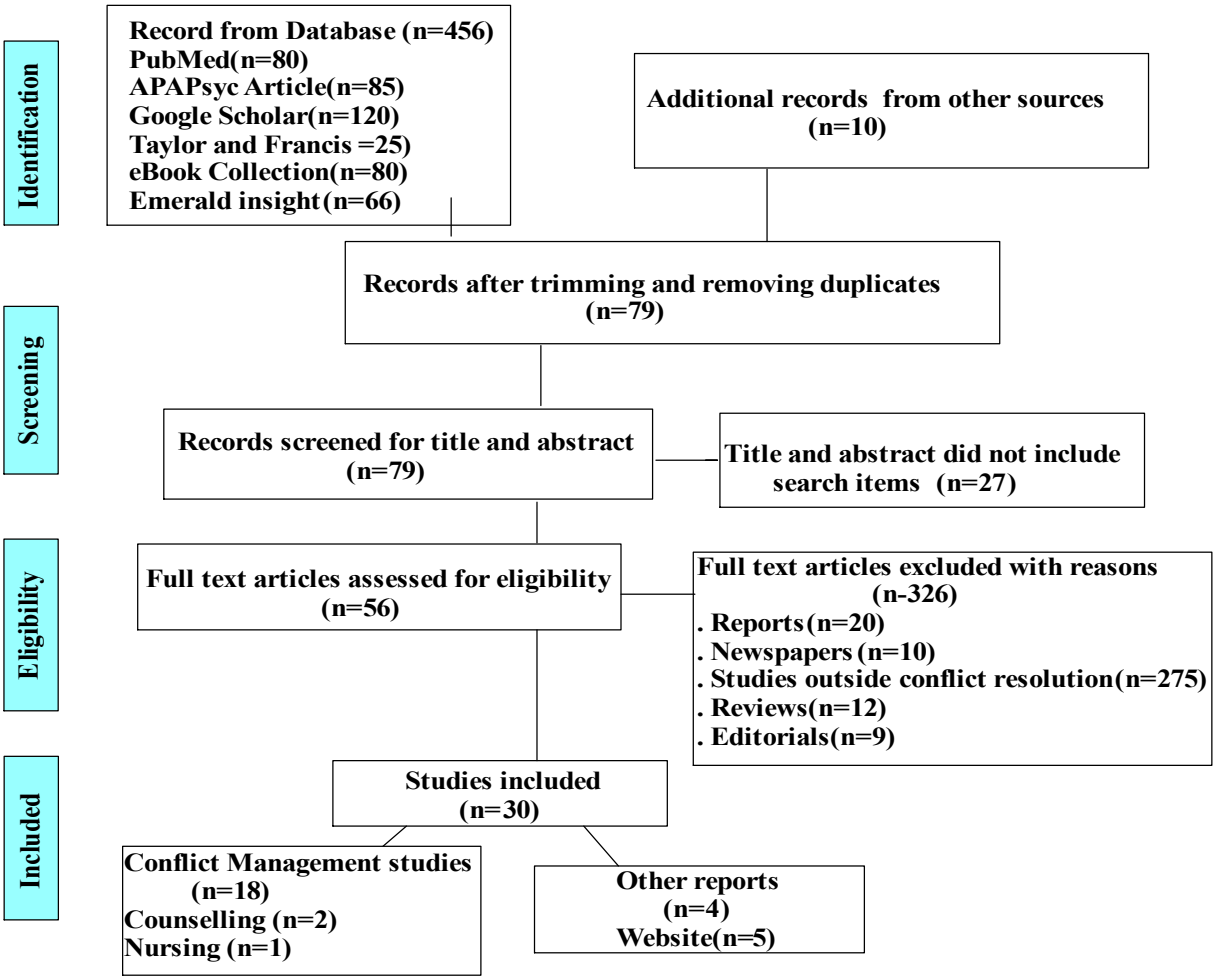
Some other measures of EI used in soe of the reviewed studies include the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), the Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profile–Short Version (WEIP-S), and the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI). Lastly, the all the methods applied in measuring the relationship between Emotional Intelligence, Counselling and Conflict resolution in all the studies were documented, hypotheses were also analysed using multiple regression, structural equation model, and ANOVA. The study keywords includes: Conflict, Conflict resolution, Counselling, Emotional intelligence, and Organisations.

A total of 456 studies were identified, and screened. 326 articles were excludedfor the fact that they were not deemed appropriate within the review scope. In the last screening, 30 studies were retained for review, having *n* to be 30.

Results

A summation of 30 studies that had the necessary criteria, published in different journals of conflict resolution management, counselling and emotional intelligence were sourced from journals of high repute, such as Google Scholar, Emerald insight, Taylor and Francis and others.

PRISMA FLOW CHART



Geographical setting and research area

Various studies reviewed were ranked in percentages due to its frequencies, and these studies were carried out in advanced countries, such as the USA(17.2%), Canada(3.4%), Singapore (3.4%), Spain (3.4%), Turkey(3.4%), Afghanistan (3.4%), Australia(10.3%), Russia(3.4%), China(6.9%), Taiwan(6.9%), South Korea(6.9%). UK(3.4%), India(6.9%), while other studies were from Africa, these includes Kenya(3.4%), and Nigeria(17.2%). From these studies, it was made obvious that the literature on EI on conflict resolution are limited in number, and the most available studies were done in the field of education as indicated in table 3.

Additional records from other sources (n=10) Records after trimming and removing duplicates (n=79) Records screened for title and abstract (n=79) Full text articles assessed for eligibility (n=56) Full text articles excluded with reasons (n–326).Other reports (n=4) Website(n=5) Included Eligibility Screening Identification PRISMA Flowchart for the study selection process Record from Database (n=456) PubMed (n=80), APA Psyc Article(n=85), Google Scholar(n=120),Taylor and Francis (n=25) eBook Collection(n=80) Emerald insight(n=66).

Table 3. This consist of: Author(s), year, journal, and locales of the 30 studies reviewed on

emotional intelligence and conflict resolution in this study.

Table 1. A*uthor (s), year, journal, and location of the 30 studies on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution assessed in this study.*

No.	Author	Year	Journal	Country	Subject Area
1.	Aguilar, Y. M.	2021	Journal of international relations, strategy and security Revstade relaciones Internacionales, Estrategiay Seguridad Spain Government	Spain	Government
2.	Ayoko & Konrad	2012	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal	Australia	Public services
3.	Basogul & Ozgür	2016	Asian Nursing Research	Turkey	University Hospital
4.	Belanger et al.	2015	International Journal of Conflict Management	Canada	Recreational Industry
5.	Caputo et al.	2019	International Journal of Conflict Management		
6.	Choi et al.	2019	International Journal of Hospitality Management	Taiwan	Hotel
7.	Chung et al.	2023	Journal of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery	China	Industry
8.	Corey	2013	Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy	USA	Psychotherapy
9.	Gandonu & Badejo	2021	Journal of Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Educational Development	Nigeria	Public/family
10.	Halevy & Cohen	2019	International Journal of Conflict Management	South Korea	Public Construction firm
11.	Hopkins & Yonker	2015	Journal of Management Development	USA	University
12.	Itumo	2019	African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies	Nigeria	University
13	Jolly et al.	2021	Journal of Organisational Behaviour	India	Wildlife
14.	Jordan & Troth	2021	Journal of Developing Human Performance	Australia	University
15.	Karimova	2015	Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences	Russia	University
16.	Lederach	1998	Institute of Peace	USA	Industry
17.	Nair	2008	International Journal of Conflict Management	India	Organisation
18.	Nzomo	2018	Kenyatta University Repository	Kenya	Public Secondary School
19.	Olatunji	2020	Journal of Politics and Development	Nigeria	Industry
20.	Poitras	2012	International Journal of Conflict Management	Afghanistan	Politics

21.	Poon Teng	2002	Management Research News	Singapore	Industry/Tourism
22.	Rahim	2023	International Journal of Conflict Management	Nigeria	Industry
23.	Rahim & Psenieka	2002	The International Journal of Organizational Analysis	USA	University
24.	Schlaerth et al.	2013	Group Processes & Intergroup relations	USA	Industry
25.	Shih & Susanto	2010	International Journal of Conflict Management	Taiwan	Government
26.	Uzochukwu et al.	2016	Greener Journal of Business and Management Studies	Nigeria	Government
27.	Wen et al.	2019	International Journal of Hospitality Management	China	University
28.	Winardi et al.	2021	Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science	Australia	Firm/Company
29.	Zhang et al.	2015	International Journal of Conflict Management	South Korea	Construction Firm

Result and discussion

Measuring of cognitive ability to ascertain conflict resolution was suggested by Zhang et al., in conflict resolution management, while other researchers were of the opinion that emotions in conflict resolution plays a crucial role which cannot be downplayed (Pong et al., 2002). The literature reviewed was explicit that when conflict arises, it will either affect individual's emotional state positively or negatively, but when counsellors involved approached it with a sense of emotional intelligence, it would be resolved faster (Olatunji 2020 , Rahim, 2023).

Emotional intelligence with counselling is significantly related to organizational outcomes, including conflict resolution, and improving performances in workplaces. The 30 studies reviewed showed the significance of emotional intelligence with counselling in conflict resolution and other related outcomes surrounding organisations (Shih & Susanto, 2019; Zhang et al., 2015).

The findings of this study from reviews made revealed that emotional intelligence in counselling has a positive technique in resolving conflict in organisations, this is due to the fact that managing or resolving conflict requires consideration for the emotional and rational views of the conflicting situation (Ayoko & Konrad, 2012; Badejo & Gandonu, 2021; Schlaerth et al., 2013; Shih and Susanto, 2010, Zhang et al., 2015).

Furthermore, EI has been seen to be significantly linked with organisational outcomes in the areas of conflict management or resolution and job performance. Over 20 studies indicated how EI had aided significantly in resolving conflicts in organisations, hence, culminating into positive performances at workplaces (Shih & Susanto, 2019), innovation performance (Zhang et al., 2015), and cultural diverse workgroups (Ayoko & Konrad, 2012), while five studies further identified how EI has remained a moderating variable to managing and resolving conflicts at different

organizational level. Six studies also demonstrated that EI was a significant moderating variable to conflict management (Aguilar, 2021; Ayoko & Konrad, 2012; Olatunji, 2020; Wen & Hou, 2019, Rahim, 2023; Winardi et al., 2021).

The findings from this review clearly indicated EI as a positive strategy in counselling for resolving and managing conflict effectively with the consideration of both rational and emotional perspectives of the conflicting situation or parties involved (Olatunji, 2020).

The original search from database generated 456 studies. These data were from PubMed (80); APA Psyc articles (85); Google scholar (120); Taylor and Francis (25); Ebook collection (80); Emerald insight (66). These were screened for relevance, and was screened and reduced to 79 articles. From the screened data, 1 article from Emerald insight; 1from APA Psycinfo; other articles were generated from Google scholar, websites and reports. The screening for duplicates removed 326 articles generated from the initial search. A total of 30 studies were included in this review. The procedure for study selection is illustrated in Figure 2. Two studies were conducted in selected Nigerian universities (Olatunji, 2020, Uzochukwu et al., 2016), while one was conducted among nursing population (Basogul & Ozgur, 2016, Namadi, 2016), one was also done among married couples (Gandonu & Badejo, 2021), one thesis was reviewed on public secondary school (Nzomo, 2018), There are different prevalence level of emotional intelligence in counselling on conflict resolution from the studies. Though, it may be quite impossible to record all the levels of emotional intelligence prevalence in Nigeria due to the varied nature of studies reviewed.A prevalence level of conflict 72.8% was recorded from youths, 68.1% was recorded for students, 85% was recorded for the workplaces/organisations, while, 14.4% was recorded for households.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, certain recommendations were made:

1. Counsellors and leaders should endeavour to understand individuals' cultural and geographical differences and ensure the application of emotional intelligence in whatever approach adopted in resolving conflict in organisations.
2. Counsellors should be abreast of relevant information in work places and be alert to conditions where potential conflicts may possibly prevail.
3. Counsellors and managers need to be privy to the level of emotional intelligence among members in the organization, thereby guiding conduct and relationship paths, this will also make organisations to conduct an inventory to ascertain the level of every individual in the organization.
4. Lastly, due to the critical role of emotional intelligence in resolving conflict, it would be necessary for leaders, counsellors and managers to frequently undergo trainings for themselves and for staff personal development, especially in the area of emotional Intelligence, and this will enhance interpersonal relationships and promote more productivity in organisations.

Conclusion

This study has shown a relational significance of emotional intelligenceand counselling in conflict resolution, establishing the major components of emotional intelligence, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, and how it can be effectively applied in organisations alongside counselling for conflict resolution. It can be further concluded that the understanding of emotional intelligence and it's application by counsellors or managers will foster effective and enduring conflict resolution in homes and organisations.

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ROLE OF COUNSELLORS IN MARITAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

Marital conflict is a critical matter in many families across the world and specifically in Nigeria. Many families have crumbled and some couples live as if they are strangers in their own home because of persistent and unresolved conflicts. If the situation continues like that without it being effectively managed, the effect could be very devastating to the couple's emotional well-being and mental health; which may also be extended to their children. This paper is intended to give an insight into the concept of marital conflict and the role of counselling in its resolution

Keywords: counsellors, conflict, marital conflict, resolution

Introduction

Marriage is a duration of life union between male and female. It is the oldest institution that has ever existed (Afu & Nteh, 2020). The increasing rate of divorce in the society today justifies the fact that there are conflicts in marital homes (Olaitan, 2023). In the intricate dynamics of human interaction, conflict is both inevitable and natural. Whether it arises in families, workplaces, or interpersonal relationships, conflict can significantly and negatively affect one's mental health and well-being if not managed effectively. It is the poor management of conflicts among couples that has led to the high rate of divorce and separated homes in our society today leading to high percentage of single mothers with its precarious effects on the children. Marriage and the family system are threatened because disharmony sets in when husband and wife disagree on certain goals to achieve resulting to conflicts and confusion between them unless they come to terms on the goal to pursue. Conflicts and disagreements are inevitable in every close relationship including marital relationship. This view is supported by Josiah and Nteh (2022) who posits that in every marriage, degree of conflict is actually necessary to keep the marriage dynamic, rather than static. Marital separation now comes in various forms, accompanied with their own myriad set of problems as individual families have their own particular conflict situations as no two marriages are the same because not all marriages fail for the same one reason, nor is there usually one main reason for the breaking down of marriages. Some marriages are peaceful and relatively

problem-free. However, crises overwhelm many others as findings have revealed that marital conflicts did exist, (Tolorunleke, 2024). There is a myriad of marital problems. They may arise from the premarital stage, to the day of the wedding and subsequent events that follow as the marriage proceeds (Akinade, 2017). As a matter of fact, marriage has been clearly seen as a centre of all human endeavors in recognition of its influence on almost all of human activities. On this note, instabilities and disharmonious experiences in marital life will not only affect the principal agents of marriage (the couple) as it also affects other parts it serves including the children and the larger society. Animasahun (2023) stressed that conflict has a way of adding undesirable outcome on the spouses. The lingering result of marital conflict usually end up in separation and finally the total collapse 'divorce' which may be interpreted as liberation but has been viewed by counsellors as a traumatic psychologically difficult condition; as the marriage worsens, sincere, constant and instant moves should be made to remedy it, considering its undesirable consequences on the entire family and the society at large. It is therefore very pertinent that marital conflicts are well resolved among couples so that families could be preserved and children's mental health protected. This is why the thrust of this article is to explore various causes of marital conflict and various strategies for effective resolution. In this context, the role of counselling in marital conflict resolution has gained prominence, offering techniques and strategies to navigate disputes constructively. This article explores how counselling helps in conflict resolution, especially among married couples.

The concept of Conflict

Conflict is a disagreement or clash between opposing ideas, interests, or forces. Some scholars view conflict as a source of innovation, creativity and development in organization (Ojika, 2024). Reuben (2022) suggested that conflicts are vital for modern organizations as well as inter-personal relationships; they are not only essential to the growth, change and evolution of living systems, but are as well as system's primary defense against stagnation, detachment, entropy and eventual extinction. Similarly, Aula (2021) argued that conflict is an important force in bringing out the difference among agent's opinions, logics and worldviews which in turn leads to more creative and novel outcomes. Furthermore, conflict can be both constructive and destructive.

Constructive conflict, which is also known as functional conflict is said to occur when an individual (like husband or wife) has or exhibits respect for other individuals friendly and palatable alongside reproachful and challenging viewpoints, ideas, beliefs, and assumptions, even when such viewpoints stir division or disagreement among the personnel in the organizations, systems, families or groups (Adeyemi & Ademila, 2015). In addition, the tenets of functional or constructive conflict are considered useful for the family as it makes the family dynamic as couples learn from each other.

Destructive conflict (otherwise dysfunctional conflict) on the other hand is thought to increase dissatisfaction and decrease the affective wellbeing of the parties involved. In view of this, it is discouraged in families due to its propensity to damage the attainment of harmonious

working relationship among couples and other members of the family. Obviously, conflict is a part of human consciousness in all aspects of life. One cannot avoid conflict whether at home, on the road at the workplace or in organizations.

Marital Conflict

Marital conflict is a phenomenon that destabilizes the couple and disrupt their joy. Animashaun (2023) asserts that it is a profound social problem, sapping couples' energy, compromising their physical and mental health. Marital conflict most times does not end with quarrels and fights; it often leads to separation or divorce if not resolved well and on time. Marital conflict is not just a difference of opinion; rather, it is a series of events that have been poorly handled that have deeply damaged the marriage relationship. Marriage issues have escalated to such an extent that stubbornness, pride, anger, hurt and bitterness prevent effective marriage communication. Almost all serious marital discord is rooted in the selfishness of one or both parties. Saving a marriage means rejecting selfishness, abandoning ego, forgiving hurt, and letting go of bitterness. Marriage is a relationship where trust is built over time as committed couples put their own interests aside for the well-being of their partner and develop the skills to keep the relationship positive and open.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict resolution according to Umana (2019) involves implementation of strategies to limit the negative aspects of conflicts and increase the positive aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance peaceful coexistence; it is not concerned with eliminating all conflicts or avoiding conflict entirely. Rahim (2021) says that conflict resolution strategy is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution. He added that committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to each other (e.g., intentions; reasons for holding certain beliefs) and by engaging in collective negotiation. The following are some conflict resolution strategies according to Umana (2019):

Accommodating Strategy: The accommodating strategy essentially entails giving the opposing side what it wants. The use of accommodation often occurs when one of the parties wishes to keep the peace or perceives the issue as minor. Accommodating or harmonizing, is viewed as the peacekeeper mode as it focuses more on preserving relationships than on achieving a personal goal or result. However, in a dispute this creates a lose/win relationship where the accommodating party may make a choice to acquiesce to the needs of the other, sometimes out of kindness and sometimes to avoid conflict or stress. "Giving in" and letting the other person "take" is the result when this choice is made. While this may be seen as a weak or non-productive position there are situations when this approach is preferable and will gain more for a person than by taking a strong position. It can be both a productive and unproductive strategy in the give and take process (Ibeh, Obidoa & Okere, 2018). Accommodating involves minimizing or suppressing

real or perceived differences while focusing on the other's views of the situation. According to Momanyi and Juma (2016), a person using accommodating style of conflict resolution tends to be co-operative but assertive. They agree to the wishes of others, smoothing over or overlooking differences to maintain harmony. Accommodation results in a lose-win solution and a good relationship between parties are created. This relationship is created when people appeal for co-operation and try to reduce tension and stress by offering reassurance and support for the other person's views.

Avoiding Strategy: The avoidance strategy seeks to put off conflict indefinitely. By delaying or ignoring the conflict, the avoider hopes the problem resolves itself without a confrontation. Those who actively avoid conflict frequently have low esteem or hold a position of low power. In some circumstances, avoidance strategy can serve as a profitable conflict management strategy.

Collaborating Strategy: Collaboration works by integrating ideas set out by multiple people. The object is to find a creative solution acceptable to everyone. Collaboration, though useful, calls for a significant time commitment not appropriate to all conflicts, (Umana, 2019).

Compromising Strategy: Conflict resolution is a vital aspect of maintaining harmony and efficiency in various domains, from personal relationships to international diplomacy. Among the myriad strategies employed, the compromise strategy stands out as a pragmatic method that seeks a middle ground between conflicting parties. The compromising strategy typically calls for both sides of a conflict to give up elements of their position in order to establish an acceptable, if not agreeable, solution. This approach involves each party making concessions to reach a mutually acceptable solution, emphasizing flexibility and mutual benefit (Cheta-Maclean, 2023). The essence of compromise lies in its ability to integrate diverse perspectives and needs into a balanced resolution. It is predicated on the principle of give-and-take, where each party relinquishes certain demands to achieve a workable solution (Ololube, 2024). This strategy is particularly effective in scenarios where couples have competing interests but no party holds a decisive advantage or is willing to accept a win-lose outcome. One significant advantage of the compromise strategy is its capacity to foster cooperation and preserve relationships. Unlike adversarial approaches that may exacerbate hostilities, compromise promotes a spirit of collaboration and respect. According to Ololube (2024), compromise allows parties to address their core interests while maintaining a level of goodwill. This is crucial in ongoing relationships, as it helps to build trust and prevent future conflicts. However, compromise is not without its limitations. It may sometimes result in suboptimal solutions where neither party's needs are fully met, potentially leading to dissatisfaction or future grievances (Cheta-Maclean & Tobins, 2023). This is particularly relevant in high-stakes conflicts where the stakes are too high for the parties to accept less-than-ideal outcomes. In such cases, compromise may be seen as a temporary fix rather than a comprehensive solution. Despite these limitations, the compromise strategy remains a valuable tool in conflict resolution. Its effectiveness often depends on the willingness of the parties involved to engage in honest dialogue and demonstrate flexibility. In summary, the

compromise strategy is a practical approach to conflict resolution that emphasizes flexibility, cooperation, and mutual concession. While it may not always provide a perfect solution, it facilitates the resolution of conflicts by integrating diverse perspectives and preserving relationships. As Ololube (2024) asserted, compromise, when approached with a spirit of goodwill and open communication, can effectively address conflicts and lead to sustainable resolutions.

Competing Strategy: Competing strategy is characterized by a win-lose orientation where one party seeks to prevail at the expense of the other. This approach, while often perceived as aggressive, can be effective in specific contexts where decisive action is needed. The competing strategy also referred to as a competing or forcing approach, involves one party asserting its position with the goal of achieving its objectives regardless of the other party's interests (Ololube, 2024). It is commonly used in situations where the stakes are high, and a quick resolution is necessary. This strategy can be particularly effective in emergencies or when a firm stance is required to uphold important principles or ensure compliance with rules and regulations (Cheta-Maclean, 2023). One of the primary strengths of the competing strategy is its ability to achieve immediate and clear results. In scenarios where there is no room for compromise or where a firm decision is required. However, the competing strategy also has its drawbacks. Its win-lose nature can lead to heightened tensions and damage relationships, particularly if the approach is perceived as unfair or overly aggressive. The adversarial nature of this strategy can exacerbate conflict and lead to long-term resentment or retaliation (Ololube, 2024). Furthermore, it may not be suitable in collaborative environments where maintaining positive relationships is crucial for ongoing cooperation and success. The effectiveness of the competing strategy often depends on the context and the nature of the conflict. In situations where power dynamics favor one party, or where the resolution of the conflict is critical to achieving strategic objectives, competing may be the most appropriate approach. For instance, in high-stakes negotiations where the parties have fundamentally opposing goals, a competing strategy may ensure that one party's interests are fully protected (Cheta-Maclean & Tobins, 2023). According to Onyekwere (2024), the competing strategy is a method of conflict resolution that focuses on achieving one's own objectives at the expense of the other party. While it can be effective in certain situations requiring decisive action or when quick results are needed, it also carries the risk of damaging relationships and exacerbating conflict.

Literature Review on the Causes of Marital Conflicts

Marriage as earlier said, is the oldest institution in which a man and a woman live their lives together. It is a union that brings people from different background, personalities, walk of life, ethnic group and educational exposure. These differences give room for conflict among couples. Moji, Ijoyah and Ijoyah (2015) specifically mentioned that the differences among individuals make conflict inevitable. Conflict is therefore not avoidable between couples because as couples

express their needs and desires to each other it might lead to disagreement. Ohiseghame (2021) sees conflict as an inevitable process in marital relationship and at the core of conflict in marriage is opposing needs and interest of couples. Most couples who visit counselling centres emphasize that their major problem is conflict (Boostanipoor & Zaker, 2016). Marital conflict occurs when a husband and wife struggle or have a clash as a result of the pursuant of different goals or needs (Agboola, 2018). Ohiseghame (2021) stated that what usually precedes conflict is when a partner perceives that the other has frustrated some of his or her concerns. Navindia, (2024) opined that when people get into marriage, it is with the intention of "till death do us part" but circumstances such as dispute over money, expectations, sexual intimacy, children as well as dealing with in-laws create conditions for conflict and this may have negative consequence on the quality of the relationship when conflicts are not properly managed.

Consequently, a number of issues can result into conflict between couples. Afu and Nteh (2020) stated that families are faced with lots of conflict-inducing challenges like the dwindling financial capacity thrown up by socioeconomic factors like poverty, unemployment and pressure from family and friends. Tolorunke, (2024) discovered from her study in Ijumu that marital conflict was as a result of socio-economic issues, lack of partners ability to fulfil each other's sexual needs and inability to meet basic needs of the family. Papp, Cummings and Goeke-Morey (2021) discovered that conflicts over money were more likely to be a continuous source of conflict. Amadi and Amadi (2014) in their work itemized the following as the causes of marital conflict: social incompatibility of spouses, sexual incompatibility, extreme sexual orientation, extramarital affairs, dealing with relations and in-laws, lack of respect for each other, dishonesty and moral decadence, negligent behaviour of spouses, poor communication and unwholesome social behavior. These authors stated that about 80% of their respondent agreed that sex was a major source of conflict and that the problem is that one spouse is not getting enough sex or not satisfied because couples have different sexual desires. Particularly, Dilon (2015), suggest that initiation of sex by husband and rejection of this gesture could be a source of conflict. Afu and Nteh (2020) found from their study that upbringing of children, childlessness, lack of financial stability and differences in religions were factors causing conflict between spouses in Benue. However, the results from the research by Asadi, Sadegh, Taghdisi, Zamani-Alavijeh, Shojaeizadeh and Khoshdel (2016) showed that when husbands in their sample were in unfavourable conditions they use derogatory words on their wives especially wives who request for a better life. Hence these authors found out that the use of negative words is a source of conflict. This is also consistent with the findings of Dilon (2015) who found out that negative communication, which is characterized by aggression and contention increased couples' dissatisfaction and is as well a predictor of divorce.

Apart from these, Asadi et. al (2016) also found that different opinions and perception about issues, was a potential source of marital conflict. Pap et al (2019) found out from their study that one of the topics mostly discussed that causes marital conflict is issues about children. Obelenienė

and Gabševičienė (2015) emphatically stated that children's education is one of the most pervasive sources of spousal conflict. These authors found out from their study that major causes of conflict among spouses were disparity in opinion, interests, lack of material needs, immaturity of spouses, and lack of good communication, respect and attention. It is therefore pertinent to note that the causes of marital conflict include but not limited to: money, expectations, sexual intimacy, children up-bringing, extended family interference, extramarital affairs, lack of respect, religious beliefs, communication breakdowns, gender roles and derogatory words.

Counsellors' Roles in Marital Conflict Resolution

A counselor is defined as a professional, skilled in the act of assisting individuals to set and achieve feasible goals to cope with problems of living, and to grow by a process of identifying and mobilizing their personal and environmental resources Ekennia (2018). Counsellors in this regard are educators with perfected skills, knowledge and personality which distinguish them from the rest of the population.

Counsellors play a pivotal role in resolving marital conflicts by serving as neutral third parties who facilitate safe and open communication among couples. Their influence is vital, especially in high-stress situations where emotions can run high. They help couples identify the root causes of their conflicts, guiding clients through a structured process that includes assessment, goal setting, and exploring various conflict resolution techniques. Counselling sessions typically begin with an emphasis on active listening. This technique ensures that all parties feel heard and understood, creating an environment conducive for resolution. By employing skills such as empathy and negotiation, counsellors empower clients to express their feelings and perspectives clearly. This approach fosters mutual understanding, which is often the first step toward resolving marital conflicts.

Counselling Techniques in Marital Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution counselling employs various techniques that facilitate effective communication and understanding among the couples involved and according to Navindia, (2024), they are as follows:

1. **Mindfulness:** this technique or method helps couples maintain calmness during disputes, allowing them to approach conflicts with a clearer mind. It encourages participants to pause and reflect, reducing emotional reactivity and fostering a more constructive dialogue.
2. **Active listening:** this involves fully concentrating on what the other party is saying, showing respect and building trust. Key components include non-interruption and reflective listening, where the counselor paraphrases or summarizes what has been said. This practice ensures all parties feel heard and understood, which is vital for resolving issues amicably.
3. **The 'win-win waltz' model:** this is a structured approach used in conflict resolution therapy. This model encourages spouses to express their initial positions and then explore the

underlying concerns that fuel the conflict. This collaborative framework helps in creating a mutually agreed-upon resolution plan, fostering an environment where understanding and compromise are prioritized.

4. **Assertive Communication and 'I' Statements:** In practice, using assertive communication and 'I' statements plays a critical role in reducing defensiveness and promoting dialogue. By focusing on the issue at hand and steering clear of personal blame, spouses can work towards a resolution that respects each other's needs. These methods collectively enhance communication, develop emotional awareness, and encourage profound understanding, all of which are crucial for resolving marital conflicts effectively.

The overarching goal of conflict resolution counselling is not just to settle disputes but to strengthen relationships and enhance emotional well-being. Ultimately, these interactions contribute to personal growth and improved communication skills, laying the groundwork for healthier interactions in the future.

How Counselling Techniques Help in Conflict Resolution

Counselling techniques play a crucial role in conflict resolution by enhancing communication and promoting understanding between disputing individuals. One of the essential skills counsellors teach is focusing on the issue at hand rather than making it personal. This shift helps maintain a respectful dialogue, reducing the likelihood of escalation during discussions. Techniques such as reflective listening, where individuals paraphrase or summarize what they hear, ensure that participants feel heard and understood. This fosters a constructive exchange and builds empathy, a foundational element for resolving conflicts. In addition, utilizing "I" statements allows individuals to express their thoughts and feelings without placing blame, which further diminishes defensiveness. Counsellors also stress the importance of timing during discussions. Engaging in conversations when individuals are calm instead of in high-stress situations leads to more fruitful interactions. Establishing ground rules for dialogue creates a safe environment for addressing conflicts without interruptions or harsh critiques. Additionally, understanding personal dynamics, potentially with psychological instruments, can help illuminate underlying issues that may contribute to conflicts. These techniques do not only enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution efforts but also contribute to developing stronger and more resilient relationships among individuals involved in disputes. The impact of these counselling techniques extends beyond immediate conflict resolution. By promoting effective communication and emotional regulation, participants can resolve their disputes peacefully and learn valuable skills for the future. With a focus on understanding and collaboration, these strategies help create an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Consistent application of these techniques leads to enhanced problem-solving abilities and improved interpersonal dynamics, ultimately reducing stress and fostering personal growth. In environments where conflict is inevitable, such as workplaces and families, these skills become crucial for maintaining healthy relationships and enhancing overall emotional well-being.

Conclusion

All relationships including marriages hit speed bumps at one time or the other. Sometimes arguments over small things just keep creeping in, and it feels like one is stuck in a loop. These aren't just isolated incidents or quirks we need to brush off; they're recurring relationship conflicts that often stem from misunderstandings or unmet needs. They can wear down the strongest bonds, leaving the couples involved feeling frustrated and disconnected.

Professional help offers a path to navigate these rough patches, and this is where counselling comes in. Counselling provides tools to understand each other better and improve communication. It's about finding ways to address the ongoing issues without letting them spiral into larger problems. With guidance from a counsellor, couples can discover new ways to connect and build a stronger partnership over time. Counselling plays an integral role in marital conflict resolution by equipping couples with the tools and skills necessary to navigate disputes effectively. Through techniques such as active listening, empathy building, and structured communication, counsellors help individuals and groups manage conflicts in ways that strengthen relationships and enhance emotional well-being. These approaches not only promote understanding and cooperation but are also pivotal in preventing conflicts from escalating into more serious disputes. It is therefore recommended that spouses having conflicts should seek the services of a counsellor who would use some effective strategies and techniques to help them resolve their conflict amicably so as to avoid divorce and its resultant effects.

Suggestions

In this context, the following are recommended for couples to avoid future marital conflicts:

- Couples should endevour to foster open communication. Having a communication without a biased mind may help the couple communicate effectively without finding faults.
- While having a conversation, they should encourage active listening instead of talking much which may lead to heated arguments. Active listening aids one to understand one's partner's viewpoint by listening without interrupting.
- Couples should try as much as possible to regulate their emotions such as taking constructive timeouts to avoid escalations.
- Couples should expunge the passion and desire to win all arguments because one may win an argument but lose the heart of one's partner.

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COUNSELLING AND FAMILY CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

The study investigated Family Conflict Resolution: Has counselling an answer to it? The population of the study consisted of twenty thousand and eighteen (20018) families in Ngor Okpala LGA in Imo State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. A sample size of one thousand and one (1001) families was drawn from the population using simple random sampling technique. Three purposes and research questions guided the study. A 25 item structured questionnaire titled families conflict resolution strategies (FCRS) was used to elicit information from respondents. The responses pattern adopted for the questionnaire was a four point rating scale pattern. Validation of the instrument was carried out by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, and Guidance and Counselling. The reliability index of 0.80 was established using cronbach Alpha Analysis. Data analysis was done using mean score of 2.5 as the reference for acceptance. The study revealed among others that causes of family conflict are numerous such as communication, financial concerns and sibling's rivalry, also that counselling can be an answer to family conflict. Based on these findings, it was recommended that professional counsellors should extend their services to non-school settings like the family for the good and well-being of members from such families.

Introduction

The family constitutes the basic and essential unit of the society. It is the first socializing agent of the child. The family is described as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction (Holborn, 2008), in Ukoha and Opara (2013). In his own contribution, Jayesh (2025) states that a family is considered to be a group of individuals related by blood, who are committed to one another's well-being. Family according to Kunz (2012) is a

group of two people or more related by birth, marriage or adoption and residing together. A

family is made up of father, mother, siblings, and by extension, cousins, nieces, nephews, grandparents, step-parents and in-laws. Our family can be our greatest source of support, comfort and love. But can also be our greatest source of pain and grief. Such as a health crisis, work problems or teenage rebellion, may all threaten to tear a family apart. It can then be seen that the family unit has economic, physical, social and emotional bonds; and whatever affects one member, affects the others.

All families at some time experience difficulties, quarrels and stress. These bring about what are referred to as family conflicts or disputes. From source across the web, beyond intractability (2025) defined family conflict as any conflicts that occur within the family – between husband and wife, parents and children, between siblings, or with extended families (grandparents, aunts, uncles etc.). These family conflicts are caused by many factors such as communication issues, financial concerns, money, personal differences, parenting styles, Health conditions, job burnout, substance abuse, unhealthy expectations, sibling rivalry, conflict avoidance, divorced parents, in-law related conflict, parental relationship problems, care giving responsibilities, grandparent interference, insecurities, marital problems, unresolved past issues and occupational stress (Jayesh, 2025).

Conflict according to Kunz (2012) is an inescapable component of human relationships. Conflict happens when people differ in their feelings, thoughts or behaviours. Conflict can be beneficial if it forces people to confront problems. However, when conflict is not resolved and does not enable personal growth, it can become harmful and may even lead to violence and abuse.

Conflict can happen when family members have different views or beliefs that clash. Sometimes, conflict can occur when people misunderstand each other and jump to the wrong conclusion. As emphasized by Jayesh (2025), family conflicts include any conflict between people who are related in some way, or who are part of a family or have been part of a family in the past. Such as (1) Within families example, between couples, parents and children, siblings (2) Between families, such as adult siblings and their families, grandparents and their children's families, blended or step families; (3) Between separated couples and their families. Families, even the most close-nit, experience conflict such as siblings' rivalry, marital clash and extended family issues. When these causes of conflict are left unaddressed, they can lead to resentment estrangement, and a breakdown of the family unit (Caplan, 2024).

Caplan (2024) buttressed his view and saw family conflict as a natural part of family life, but when left unresolved, they can lead to significant stress and dysfunction within the family unit. The common ones according to him include marital conflicts, parent-child conflicts, siblings' rivalries and extended family issues. In their own assertion, Sterk family law (2025) presented ten (10) common causes of family conflicts as miscommunication or lack of communication, differing values and beliefs, financial stress, parenting styles, siblings rivalry, roles and responsibilities, unresolved past issues, life transitions, work life balance, external, external

influences and social pressures.

Donald (2013) regards family conflict as an interpersonal process that occurs whenever the action of one person interferes with the actions of another. Partners or family members can come into conflict over practically any kind of issue. The family members do not experience this interference in the same areas and at same levels of intensity. These conflicts if not properly handled, can escalate to the point where interventions become necessary. There are many out of court processes like mediation and negotiation used to resolve conflicts, often with the help of a neutral third party. Counselling also comes in here as an intervention strategy to conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution according to Kunz (2013) is the process of attenuating or eliminating a source of conflict resolution of family conflicts is of great importance in that (1) It minimizes stress (2) Protects children (3) Preserves relationships (AI Overview, 2024) and reduces (4) arguments and resentments (better-health, 2024).

In family conflict resolution, it can end in one way or the other either destructively or constructively. A destructive outcome is one that has damaging effect on later interactions, while those with constructive outcome have positive benefits. However, many studies (Stephen & Ronald 1995, Joaquin, 2008) in Kunz , (2012) have shown that couples with similar conflict management styles are more likely to be satisfied with their union because similar conflict resolution styles are less likely to cause misinterpretation.

Donald (2013) feels that the way a couple deals with conflict determines whether or not the conflict will be harmful to their family/marriage, continuing, he said that the inability to deal with conflict constructively is a potent force in dampening marriage satisfaction. Therefore, since conflicts occur repeatedly, it becomes important to learn to handle conflict approximately. When conflict is not resolved in a functional way, it can have serious negative effects. Research like Eric and Malinda (2006) has documented links between conflicts in the marriage and feelings of depression and anxiety.

Jayesh (2025) is of the view that family conflict can be difficult and emotional. When relationship change, it can be hard for family members to handle things on their own. There are a number of services available to assist such as – Family Therapy, - Counselling – Mediation – Group work and support services. Giving early attention to these conflicts issues can prevent them from becoming insurmountable obstacles in a relationship.

Counselling has been variously defined by professionals. Durojaiye (1980) in Ukoha and Oparah (2013) opined that counselling involves the development of interaction between a counsellor and a person in a perceived temporary state of indecision, confusion, malfunction, habit disorder, distress or despair. The process helps the counsellor to make his own decisions to correct his behaviour disorder, to evolve new habits and to overcome distress and despair. Counselling is a way to gain perspective on your behaviour, emotions and relationships. It

provides a means to express your feelings and identity patterns of thinking. It alleviates anxiety

and anger in many forms. It helps to develop communication skills for dealing with conflicts and frustration. So, can counselling help resolve family conflicts? Yes, counselling can be a very effective way to resolve family conflicts. Family counselling which is the counselling given to one or more family members provides a safe and supportive environment for family members to communicate openly, understand each other's perspectives and develop healthy conflict – resolution skills. Through counselling, families can address underlying issues, improve communication patterns, and rebuild trust and connection (AI, Overview 2025). It can also help to understand family dynamics and prevent future conflicts, as well as enable active listening and understanding.

Family members through counselling are taught specific conflict resolution techniques such as negotiation, compromise and collaboration. Counselling further enables family members to be quick in understanding patterns and dynamics of contributory factors to conflict – individual persons with their temperaments and emotional needs. This will lead the family members to greater awareness and empathy.

Caplan (2024) reiterated that counselling can help rebuild trust, deepen connections and foster a more supportive family environment by addressing conflict and improving communication among family members. Having equipped family members with the necessary skills; they can now handle future conflicts constructively so that they don't become insurmountable.

Donald (2013) posited that counselling helps both partners to mutually participate in conflict resolution. This enables them to develop creative agreements that are acceptable to both and that are in line with their common goals. When this is accomplished, power and responsibilities are shared equally and cooperation replaces resistance within the family relationship.

The conflict theory of Karl Marx influenced this study. This theory believes that those who control the resources in a family have all the power. Conflict theorists believe that conflict is inevitable and necessary in a family because it results to change and adaptation. Individual family members are motivated to pursue their own needs, goals, values, which often conflict with the needs, values and goals of other family members, resulting in a struggle for power. Sources of power within a family, to these theorists include legitimacy, money, physical coercion, and love. People who have power want to maintain status quo, while people without power want to change the system to make it fairer (Kunz, 2012).

In a 2006 study of 106 boys by Eric and Malunt, they found out and concluded that children from conflicted families have fewer friends compared with children from families with less conflict. In another study of 450 married couples in 2004 by Annmarie, Daniel and Wanda, they looked at these couples during the first two years of their marriage and found out that couples who expressed unhappiness in their marriages were more likely to exhibit negative communication behaviours such as withdrawing.

Statement of the Problem

The rate at which families get troubled and destabilized at any little instance is heart rendering. Little issues tend to get so blown up, disproportionate and destabilize members of the family, just because of different, unreliable orientations they have concerning family issues and their resolution, consequently families are plunged into conflicts that make the family dysfunctional.

The authors believe that with proper reorientation towards family conflict, particularly receiving counselling, and learning effective skills and techniques, will go a long way in equipping family members to handle future conflicts constructively thereby strengthening family bonds. It is based on this premise that the researchers set out to examine counselling and family conflict resolution.

Purpose of the Study

The study generally is to find out if counselling is an answer to conflict resolutions in families in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. Specifically, it sets out to:

1. Determine the major causes of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.
2. Ascertain the different resolution methods for family conflicts in Ngor Okpala.
3. Determine if counselling can be used as an effective method for family conflict resolution.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What are the major causes of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?
2. What other resolution methods can be used for family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?
3. Can counselling be used as an effective method for family conflict resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprises of all the 20018 families in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. of Imo State. Simple random sampling with non-replacement techniques was used to select 5% families representing a sample of 1001 families. Instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire on a four (4) point rating scale of strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SA), with a scale of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. The face and content validity of the instrument were ascertained by two experts from Measurement and Evaluation, and two from Guidance and Counselling Reliability of the instrument was determined using test-retest method, and a reliability index of 0.86 was obtained using cronbach Alpha technique. All the instrument administered were collected, but twenty two of them were wrongly filled learning 979 for data analysis. Data analysis were done using mean, with mean of 2.5 as reference for acceptance while below 2.5 were rejected.

Results

Research Question One: What are the major causes of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala?

Table 1: *Mean scores of the major causes of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala*

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
1.	Communication Issues	2496	540	180	85	3301	3.37	Accepted
2.	Financial Concerns	2356	690	144	88	3278	3.35	"
3.	Personal Differences	1548	561	432	189	2730	2.79	"
4.	Parenting Styles	1712	945	326	73	3056	3.12	"
5.	Health Conditions	1448	636	484	163	2731	2.78	"
6.	Job Burnout	1560	801	402	121	2884	2.95	"
7.	Substance Abuse	1640	927	306	107	2980	3.04	"
8.	Unhealthy Expectations	1432	594	460	193	2679	2.74	"
9.	Sibling Rivalry	2700	639	182	-	3521	3.6	"
10.	Conflict Avoidance	1488	733	408	162	2781	2.84	"
11.	In-Law Related Conflicts	2244	663	206	94	3207	3.28	"
12.	Grand Parent Interference	1916	906	202	97	3121	3.19	"
13.	Marital Problems	1116	1245	362	104	2827	2.89	"
14.	Unresolved Past Issues	852	2025	150	16	3043	3.11	"

Results of data analysis presented in Table 1 above shows that family conflict has many causes such as analyzed on the table. This is seen in items 1-14 with their mean scores ranging from 2.79 – 3.37, all being above the reference mean of 2.5 and so accepted. Based on the data above, the answer to research question 2 is that there are many major causes of family conflict in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.

Research Question Two: What other methods can be used for resolution of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?

Table 2: *Mean scores of other methods for family conflicts resolution in Ngor Okpala*

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
15.	Mediation	2496	540	180	85	3301	3.37	Accepted
16.	Negotiation	2356	690	144	88	3278	3.35	"
17.	Counselling	884	1683	206	94	2869	2.93	"
18.	Compromise	1560	801	402	121	2884	2.95	"
19.	Collaboration	792	1074	460	193	2519	2.57	"
20.	Conciliation	1208	1437	202	97	2944	3.01	"

Results of data analysis presented in Table 2 above revealed that there are resolution methods that can be used to resolve family conflicts. Evidence is shown by items 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 with their means scores of 3.37, 2.93, 3.35, 2.95, 2.57 and 3.01 respectively, all above the reference mean of 2.5. This means that all the items on the table are possible methods that can be used in the resolution of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.

Research Question Three: Can counselling be used as an effective method of family conflicts resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?

Table 3: *Mean scores of how counselling can be used as an effective method of family conflicts resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.*

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
	Counselling can be used to foster the following in a family conflict resolution							
21.	It helps family members to learn to communicate effectively	496	639	180	52	3367	3.44	Accepted
22.	It minimizes stress for our family members	2408	557	262	47	3314	3.39	"
23.	It will help us to preserve our relationships	2340	609	226	78	3253	3.32	"
24.	It facilitates understanding among family members	2204	507	364	77	3152	3.22	"
25.	It enables family members to handle conflicts constructively	2588	612	220	18	3438	3.51	"

Results of data in Table 3 above, indicate that counselling can be used as an effective method of family conflicts resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. This is observed from items 21, 22, 23, 24

and 25 with their mean scores of 3.44, 3.39, 3.32, 3.22 and 3.51 respectively being above the

reference mean of 2.5. Based on the data above, the answer to research question 3 is that counselling can be used as an effective method of family conflict resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.

Discussion

The results of data analysis for research question one in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. This is observed from the mean scores of all the items being above the reference mean of 2.5. This agrees with the stipulation of Jayesh (2025) that family conflicts are caused by many factors such as communication issues, financial concerns, money, personal differences, parenting styles, health conditions, job burnout, substance abuse etc. It's also in line with sterk family law (2025) ascertain that ten (10) causes of family conflict include miscommunication or lack of communication, financial stress, parenting styles, sibling rivalry, unresolved past issue, extend influences etc. The implication of the above is that couples awareness that family conflict is inevitable, will help them to identify these causes early as to know how to handle conflict appropriately to avoid negative effects and gain marital satisfaction.

On research question two, table 2, the analysis revealed that all the items listed on the table are other resolution methods that can be used for family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. obviously, all the mean scores of six (6) items are above the reference mean of 2.5 and therefore all accepted. This implies that professional family counsellors can use these other methods to resolve family conflicts. This is in agreement with Donald (2013) who stated that there are many out of court process like mediation, and negotiation used to resolve conflicts, often with the help of a neutral third party. So also counselling. Moreso, the result supports Jayesh (2025) view that when relationships change, it can be hard for family members to handle things on their own. There are a number of services available to assist such as family therapy, counselling, mediation, group work and support services. This implies that families should seek for these available services in handling their imminent conflict issues early before they become insurmountable obstacles in their relationships.

Results of data analysis for research question three, revealed that counselling can be used as an effective method for family conflict in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. This is observed from the mean scores of all the items being above the reference mean of 2.5. This finding collaborates Caplan (2025) view that counselling can help rebuild trust, deepen connections and foster a more supportive family environment by addressing conflict and improving communication, among family members. It also confirms with Donald's (2013) view that counselling helps both partners to mutually participate in conflict resolution. This enables them to develop creative agreements that are acceptable to both and that are in line with their common goals. The implication of this is that family members should be exposed to family counselling early enough to have a safe and supportive environment for family members to communicate openly, understand each other's perspectives and develop healthy conflict resolution skills, as well as prevent future conflicts in families in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Families should be aware that conflicts are natural and inevitable; therefore they should learn more about the causes of family conflict, and how to handle family conflicts constructively.
2. The counsellors should arm themselves with these different methods to resolve family conflicts.
3. Professional counsellors should extend their services to non-school settings like the family, for the good and well-being of members from such families.

Conclusion

This study has extensively looked at family conflicts and counselling as resolution. Recognizing and addressing the common causes of family conflict is essential for maintaining a healthy and functional family dynamics. Counselling offers a powerful tool for resolving conflicts and fostering healthier relationships within the family unit. With counselling, families can overcome obstacles, strengthen their bonds and develop healthier patterns of interaction that will serve them well within and beyond the counselling experience.

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AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The research explored how home-related factors influence behavioural issues among secondary school teenagers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It was guided by five research questions and five null hypotheses. The study utilized a correlational survey design with 600 respondents selected from a total population of 20,000 secondary class two students aged between 15 and 19 years. A two-stage sampling method was employed along with the Home Variables Questionnaire (HVQ) and the Students Behavioural Problem Questionnaire (SBPQ). The reliability of these instruments was assessed through the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, yielding reliability indices of 0.76 for the HVQ and 0.87 for the SBPQ. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis was used to address the six research questions, while linear regression analysis was applied to evaluate the six hypotheses. Findings indicated that the marital status of parents, family structure, parents' economic status, home training, and parents' educational level significantly ($p<0.05$) predicted adolescents' behavioural issues in secondary schools. Regression analyses revealed that parents' educational level ($R^2 = 0.767$, $p < .001$), economic status of parents ($R^2 = 0.827$, $p < .001$), marital status of parents ($R^2 = 0.80$, $p<.001$) were significant predictors of behavioural problems. The combined variables predicted ($R^2 = .675$, $p<.000$) all the behavioural problems faced by secondary school adolescents. It is concluded that parents' marital status, family dynamics, parental economic status, home training, and parental educational attainment were significant predictors of behavioural issues among adolescents in secondary schools with parent's education level as the strongest predictor of behaviour problems of adolescents in Akwa Ibom State.

Key words: adolescent, behaviour, economic status, family structure, home variable, parent

Introduction

Adolescence is a stage of physical, mental, and emotional growth that takes place from the onset of puberty until reaching adulthood, a stage of life of a young person between 10 and 19 years. (WHO, 2025). It is Adolescence is a time that the child becomes more rational in thinking and capable of evaluating and criticizing situations before they arrive at a definite conclusion (Kruger *et al*., 2011). It is characterized with physical emotional, cognitive and social changes. It is also characterized by behavioural problems such as physical aggression, immoral sexual behaviour, drug use and abuse, stealing, bullying, truancy and defiance. These challenges can hurt academic performance and relationships with peers, and might also lead to long-term issues later in life (Obimakinde *et al*., 2020; Musa & Ndagi, 2020). The home environment and parenting styles have been shown consistently to affect adolescent behaviour. For instance, the authoritative style, which involves being highly responsive and demanding, is associated with fewer behavioural problems. In contrast, authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful approaches often relate to higher levels of aggression, conduct disorders, and emotional issues (Ezeh, 2012; Fatima, 2022).

Behavioural problems are any unwanted or undesirable behaviour or a pattern of aggressive or disruptive behaviour that is contrary to societal norm that needs to be changed (Pam, 2013). Behavioural problems associated with adolescents are classified into two main categories namely externalizing and internalizing behavioural problems (Kantomaa *et al*., 2010). The externalizing problems include defiance, violent related behaviours, impulsive, hyperactivity, aggression and antisocial features such as bullying, escape from home (Wang *et al.,* 2014). Other antisocial behaviours include substance use and misuse, sexual behaviours, theft and damaging of public and private properties with its attending burdens on family, friends, school and society (Holliday *et al*., 2017). The internalizing behaviours are characterized by withdrawal, dysphoria, anxiety and other emotional problems. The display of behavioural problems varies between male and female adolescents. For instance, adolescent males abuse drugs at a higher rate when compared to the females (Anyanwu *et al*., 2017).

The behavioural problems of the adolescents can partly be attributed to the environment in which they are raised, and events surrounding their upbringing during childhood. The parental temperament, spanking during infancy, parental aggression towards a child, conduct problem of adolescents all may contribute to adolescent behavioural problems arising from home. Several home or environment factors and how these home variables affect academic performance, health and mental status of adolescents have been reported (Chinawa *et al*., 2014; Envuladu *et al*., 2017; Uloko, 2019; Budiarti & Solehudin, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

During the olden days, children were raised with good moral and behavioural upbringing that resulted in decrease in social vices and low crime rate. Today, there is increase in social vices and behavioural problems which could probably be attributed to the home of the adolescents. These

behavioural problems may probably contribute to poor academic performance, emotional problems such as attention deficit, and depression among adolescents (Hasan & Husain, 2016;

Ahmad et al., 2024; Haq & Khan, 2024). Such social vices include rape, violence, damage to public property, abuse and disrespect to constituted authorities and general moral decadence. The society cannot progress in the presence of behavioural problem pattern and with a large population of Nigerians made up of adolescents and young adults. With the high level of moral decadence prevailing in the Nigerian society, there is need to investigate if home variables could predict such adolescent behavioural problems.

Cases of adolescent behavioural problems have been reported all over the country. These problems include sexual abuse, drug and alcohol use, bullying, stealing, robbery, murder and aggressive behaviour. Studies have shown that behavioural problems such as smoking, bullying and illicit sexual intercourse occur among adolescents attending secondary schools in some part of South Eastern Nigeria (Chinawa *et al.,* 2014). A study has documented prevalence of unsafe sexual intercourse, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection among adolescent students (Envuladu *et al*., 2017).

This research aims to explore how much home-related factors can predict behavioural issues in adolescents attending secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. To explore this, the subsequent research questions were formulated and addressed to steer the study.

1. How strongly does the marital status of parents influence behavioural issues among adolescents in secondary schools?
2. How significantly does family structure impact the behavioural problems of adolescents in secondary schools?
3. What extent does economic status of parents predict adolescents' behavioural problems in secondary schools?
4. What is the extent to which home training predict behavioural problems of adolescents in secondary schools?
5. How much does the educational attainment of parents influence the behavioural issues of adolescents in secondary schools?

Objectives of the Study

The study objectives were to:

1. determine the extent marital status of parents predicts behavioural problems of adolescents in secondary schools.
2. find out the extent family structure predicts adolescents' behavioural problems in secondary schools.
3. examine the extent economic status of parents predict adolescents' behavioural problems in secondary schools.

4. determine the extent home training given to adolescent could predict behavioural problems of adolescents in secondary schools.

5. find out the extent educational level of parents could predict behavioural problems of adolescents in secondary schools.

Significance of the Study

The study will be of benefit to many people namely the counsellors, educational managers and administrators, families, organizations and students generally. The study could be of benefits to counsellors as it will enable them to isolate cases and identify home variables that may predict if an adolescent could be prone to behavioural problems. In addition, educational managers and administrators will derive benefit from the findings of this study as it will help them formulate policies and be guided on designing intervention strategies that may help reduce behavioural problems among adolescents. Also, parents, leaders, religious organizations and non-governmental organizations may understand the influence of home variables on adolescents' behaviour and thus obtain appropriate knowledge on how best to contribute in modifying the behaviour of the adolescents to acceptable standard.

Literature Review

Some factors especially marital status, family structure, economic status, home training and educational levels of parents can affect adolescent behaviour. Marital conflict and parental divorce have negative influences on the child's behaviour (Fagan & Churchill, 2012; Yakubu, 2024). Such aspects of home variables have long-term emotional effect on the behaviours of the students.

Family structure has influence on behaviour of adolescents. Intact family and adolescents that resides with both parents have delayed sexual activity and have less odd of sexual abnormal behaviour (Somefun & Odimegwu, 2018). A study documented a similar correlation between family types and social behaviour of adolescents (Ede *et al.,* 2020).

It has been reported that children from low economic and social status have more emotional and behavioural issues and is complicated by less responsive parenting style (Obimakinde *et al*., 2019; Kumuyi *et al.,* 2021). On the other hand, parental income can contribute to adolescent behavioural pattern. Children from low-income households do not perform well in life due to low-income Cooper & Stewart,2021). A study reported that parental poverty is a strong factor that drives children to delinquent behaviour (Asangausung *et al*., 2025). Also, a study documented that adolescents from low-income background had a higher tendency for risky sexual behaviour (Fortune, 2026). However, a study reported that economic levels of the parents had no significant influence on students' abnormal behaviour (Gidado & Anyio, 2026). In terms of level of education of parents, some studies have reported that educated mothers provide a more cognitively stimulating and good home training, in addition to conducive environment at home which has a positive impact on the behaviour of the child (Eamon, 2005; Iyekolo *et al*, 2021).

Although these findings exist, there is a lack of localized study in Akwa Ibom State where family norms, economic pressures, and cultural dynamics may influence parenting in unique ways.

Gaps still exist in understanding how these home variables, such as parenting style, parental involvement, socioeconomic status, family structure, parental occupation, and domestic stress, predict adolescent behavioural outcomes in secondary schools across Akwa Ibom State. This study aims to examine home factors that may predict behavioural problems in secondary school adolescents in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

Study design and study population

The correlational research design survey approach was used for the study. The study population consists of 20,000 senior secondary class two students between the ages of 15 and 19 years were selected from twelve public secondary schools located in both urban and from rural areas in three education zones of the state. The population of senior secondary class two students in each urban school was 3,000 while it was 2000 in school located in rural area (AKSG, 2019). The choice of senior secondary school two students is based on the fact that they can provide appropriate information on behavioural problems relative to home variables.

Sample and Techniques for Sampling

The sample comprised 600 secondary school two (SS2) students from twelve co-educational public secondary schools in the three education zones in Akwa Ibom State with age range of 15-19 years. The multistage sampling technique was used to select samples of the study in three education zones of the state namely, Ikot Ekpene, Uyo and Eket. Firstly, using the stratified sampling method, four secondary schools, two from rural and two from urban locations were selected from each zone for the study. Secondly, the stratified sampling method was used to select the students according to their respective school location either rural or urban area. Thirdly, the simple random sampling technique was used to select 50 SS2 students from each school. The number of students selected from each school to participate in the study was 50 students based on the fact that each school had a student population above 1000. The choice of sample size was based on the proposition that 10% of the population is adequate for a study that involved a population of a few thousand (Sarmah & Hazarika, 2012).

Research instrument

The instruments used for data collection was titled “Home Variables Questionnaire” (HVQ) and “Students Behavioural Problem Questionnaire (SBPQ)” were developed by the researcher. The HVQ has two sections. Sections I consisted of the personal data information of respondents such as name of school, sex, class and age while section II consists of twenty-one (21) items that were organized into four clusters with five item statements each. Cluster A had five items which sought information on parental level of education and occupation e.g. “what is the highest level of

education of your parents and occupation?” Cluster B had five items which sought information on

family structure of respondents. An example of key question was “my mother and father are living together”. Cluster C contained five items that obtained information on economic status of parents. An example of key item was “my parents provide my school materials and books on time”. Cluster D had six items on home training with an example of key item as “My parents encourage me to attend school every day”. Clusters B to D had statements on the four-point Likert Scale that required the respondents to indicate the extent of prediction to the items. The responses ranged from Very high extent -4 point; High extent -3 points; Low extent -2 points to Very low extent -1 point and were used for scoring each response to the statement.

The Students Behavioural Problem Questionnaire (SBPQ)” was developed by the researcher. The SBPQ has two sections. Sections I consisted of the personal biodata and school of respondent data information of respondents while section II consists of twenty-nine (29) items with five clusters classifying the behavioural problems of adolescents namely smoking, alcohol, sexual behaviour, bullying and truancy. Cluster A focuses on Smoking; Cluster B is on Alcohol; Cluster C is Sexual behaviour; Cluster D is on Bullying, while Cluster E is on Truancy. The item statements were organized in the four-point Likert Scale that required the respondents to indicate the extent of prediction to the items. The responses ranged from Very high extent -4 point; High extent -3 points; Low extent -2 points to Very low extent -1 point and were used for scoring each response to the statement.

Validity of the Instrument

The validity of the self-designed questionnaire was evaluated by two specialists in the areas of Educational Psychology and Counseling, as well as Measurement and Evaluation. Their feedback and suggestions guided in the revisions of the items, and the revised version was then administered to the sampled respondents.

Reliability of the Instrument

The questionnaire was distributed to fifty respondents that were selected from secondary schools outside the study area on two occasions within the space of two week for the reliability. Using Pearson Product Movement Correlation Coefficient, the reliability coefficients were 0.76 and 0.88 for the two instruments respectively. Specifically, the reliability coefficients were 0.77 and 0.80 for marital status, 0.80 and 0.89 for family structure, 0.77 and 0.90 for economic status of parents, 0.76 and 0.88 for home training and 0.82 and 0.88 for educational level of parents. These reliability coefficients indicated the high reliability of the instrument.

Statistical analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21). Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to conduct the

inferential analysis. Pearson correlation was used to address research questions 1-5 concerning the strength of bivariate relationships. Simple linear regression was used to test hypotheses 1-5,

assessing the unique predictive power of each variable. The check for regression assumption was multicollinearity given with regards to the high inter-correlations. A significance level was accepted as $p<0.05$.

Results

Research Question One

How strongly does the marital status of parents influence behavioural issues among adolescents in secondary schools?

Table 1*: Correlation coefficient analysis on marital status of parents and behavioural issues of adolescent students*

		MSP	BPA
MSP	Pearson Correlation	1	.802*
	Sig. level		.000
	N	600	600
BPA	Pearson Correlation	.802*	1
	Sig. level	.000	
	N	600	600
	R^2	.643	

*MSP= Marital Status of Parents, BPA= Behavioural Problems of Adolescents, *= p< 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Data as shown in Table 1 indicate a positive correlation coefficient (r) of .80 that was within the coefficient limit of ± 0.80-1.00. This shows that marital status of parents to a very highly positive extent predicts behavioural problems of adolescents in Akwa Ibom state. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of .643 indicates that 64.3% of the variance observed in the behavioural problems of adolescents was accounted for by marital status of parents. It implies that the marital status of parents predicts 64.3 percent of the behavioural issues of young people in the secondary schools.

Hypothesis One:

Marital status of parents does not significantly predict behavioural problems of adolescents in

secondary schools.

Table 2: *Linear regression of marital status of parents and prediction of behavioural issues of young students*

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.
1 Regression	776.832	1	776.832	4.866	.000
Residual	95636.112	599	159.659		
Total	96412.944	600			

Data in Table 2 revealed that marital status of parents significantly predicts behavioural problems of adolescents in secondary schools. This implies that the calculated F-value of 4.866 is significant at 0.000 level and also significant at 0.05 level of probability. Since the probability value of .000 is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the null hypothesis that marital status of parents does not significantly predict behavioural problems of adolescents in secondary schools was rejected and the alternate hypothesis upheld. Therefore, marital status of parents is a significant predictor of behavioural issues of young students in secondary schools.

Research Question Two

How significantly does family structure impact the behavioural problems of adolescents in secondary schools?

The result as presented in Table 3 indicates a positive correlation coefficient (r) of .746 which is positive and falls in the acceptable limit of ± 0.60-0.80 showing that family structure predicts behavioural issues of young adults in the state. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of .557 showed a 55.7% variance in the behavioural problems of adolescents can be explained by family structure.

Table 3: *Correlation of family structure of parents and behavioural issues adolescent in secondary schools*

		FS	BPA
FS	Pearson Correlation	1	.746*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	600	600
BPA	Pearson Correlation	.746*	1
	Significant level	0.000	
	N	600	600
	R2	.557	

*FS = Family Structure, BPA = Behavioural Problems of Adolescents; *= p< 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Hypothesis Two:

Family structure does not significantly predict adolescents' behavioural problems in secondary schools.

The result in Table 4 revealed that family structure significantly predicts behavioural issues of adolescents in high schools. This is shown by the F- value of 7.700 which is significant at the accepted level of probability. Since the p level was significant, the null hypothesis that family structure does not significantly predict behavioural issues of young adults in high schools was rejected and the alternate hypothesis that family structure significantly predicts behavioural problems was accepted. Therefore, family structure is a significant predictor of behavioural issues of adolescents in high schools.

Table 4: *Linear regression of family structure and behavioural difficulties of adolescent students*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
1 Regression	1212.111	1	1212.111	7.700	.000
Residual	94330.707	599	157.479		
Total	95542.181	600			

Research Question Three

What extent does economic status of parents predict adolescents' behavioural problems in

secondary schools?

As presented in Table 5, there was a positive correlation coefficient (r) of .827 showing a

high extent and positive and falls within the acceptable coefficient limit of ± 0.60-0.80. This reflects that economic status of parents to a high positive extent predicts behavioural difficulties of adolescents in the State. The R^2 of .684 means 68.4% of the variance in the behavioural problems of adolescents was accounted for by family structure.

Hypothesis Three

Economic status of parents does not significantly predict adolescents' behavioural problems in secondary schools.

The result in Table 6 revealed that financial status of parents significantly predicts behavioural issues of adolescents in secondary schools. This is shown by the calculated F- value of 8.199 that was significant at the selected levels of probability. Since the probability value was significant, the null hypothesis that family structure was rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. Therefore, economic status of parents is a significant predictor of behavioural issues that adolescents face in high schools.

Table 5: *Correlation on economic status of parents and behavioural issues of adolescent in schools*

		ESP	BPA
ESP	Pearson Correlation	1	.827*
	Sig. level		.000
	N	600	600
BPA	Pearson Correlation	.827*	1
	Sig. level	0.000	
	N	600	600
	R^2	.684	

ESP = Economic Status of Parents, BPA= Behavioural issues of adolescents

*= p< 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6: *Linear regression of economic status of parents and behavioural issues of young students*

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	Sig.
1 Regression	1330.928	1	1330.928	8.199	.000
Residual	97230.936	599	162.322		
Total	98561.864	600			

Research Question Four

What is the extent to which home training predict behavioural problems of adolescents in

secondary schools?

As it is presented in Table 7, a positive correlation coefficient (r) of .72 and with a coefficient limit of ± 0.60-0.80 indicates a high positive extent predicts behavioural issues of young adults in the State. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of .524 showed that 52.4% variance observed in the behavioural problems of adolescents was accounted for by home training.

Table 7: *Pearson product moment correlation on home training by parents and behavioural problems of adolescent students*

		HT	BPA
HT	Pearson Correlation	1	.724*
	Sig. level		.000
	N	600	600
BPA	Pearson Correlation	.724*	1
	Sig. level	.000	
	N	600	600
	R^2	.524	

*HT= Home Training, BPA= Behavioural Problems of Adolescents * = p< 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Hypothesis Four

Home training does not significantly predict adolescents' behavioural problems in secondary schools.

Data in Table 8 showed that home training significantly predicts behavioural issues of adolescents in high schools. This is shown by the calculated F-value of 22.573 which showed significance at the accepted levels of probability. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis that home training significantly predicts adolescents' behavioural issues in secondary school was accepted. Therefore, home training is a significant predictor of behavioural problems of adolescents in secondary schools.

Table 8: *Linear regression of home training and adolescents' behavioural difficulties*

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.
1 Regression	3441.469	1	3441.469	22.573	.000
Residual	85223.741	559	152.457		
Total	88665.21	600			

Research Question Five

How much does the educational attainment of parents influence the behavioural issues of adolescents in secondary schools?

Data presented in Table 9 has a positive correlation coefficient (r) of .876 with an acceptable ± 0.80-1.00 coefficient limit. This means that educational level of parents to a very highly positive extent predicts adolescents' behavioural malady the State. The R^2 of .767 means 76.7% of the behavioural issues of adolescents was accounted for by level of education of parents.

Hypothesis Five

Educational level of parents does not significantly predict adolescents' behavioural problems in secondary schools.

Data in Table 10 revealed that educational level of parents significantly predicts behavioural problems of young students in secondary schools. This is shown by the F- value of 15.670 which was significant at the accepted probability levels helping us to reject the null hypothesis that educational level of parents does not significantly predict behavioural problems of young adults attending secondary schools and accepting the alternate hypothesis that educational level of parents significantly predicts adolescents' behavioural problems in secondary schools. Therefore, educational level of parents is a significant predictor of behaviour-related problems associated with adolescents in secondary schools.

Table 10: *Parents' level of education and adolescents' behavioural problems*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
1 Regression	4817.523	1	4817.523	15.670	.000
Residual	171853.151	559	307.430		
Total	176670.674	600			

Discussion

This study was carried out to investigate how home-related factors influence behavioural issues among secondary school teenagers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Using a correlational study approach, major findings were that marital status of parents, family structure, economic

status, home training and educational levels of parents significantly predicts behavioural issues of

adolescents in secondary schools. Marital status was a significant predictor of the behavioural problems among adolescents in these schools. This indicates a connection between the behavioural issues of adolescents and their parents' marital status. This result is in agreement with a previous research that marital status of the parents influences the behaviour, characteristics and academic performance of a person (Rawatlal *et al*., 2015). Hassan and Hatab (2021) reported that adolescents from broken family have behaviour problems. A previous study documented that family stability among other factors had a strong impact on delinquency of young people in secondary school students in Uyo metropolis (Sanni et al., 2010). Students from divorced parents often engaged in behavioural problems than students from intact homes that their parents were married and living together (Fatoki & Kobiowu, 2020). A study reported that family and neighbourhood cohesion reduced both internal and external behavioural problems of adolescents (Sitnik-Warchulska *et al*., 2025). This finding stresses the need for a cordial and intact family in order to mitigate adolescent behavioural problems as the marital status of parents affected the behaviour of adolescents.

The results also shows that family structure is an important predictor of behavioural issues among adolescents in secondary schools. The negative behaviours displayed by secondary school students are linked to the family situations, including single-parent households, or either intact or fractured families. The result is in consonance with the findings of Owuamanam and Bankole (2013) and Akanbi *et al*., (2015) who documented that family structure (whether intact or broken) significantly influenced adolescent sexual behaviours and sexual promiscuity respectively. Family structure is associated with adolescents' behavioural and emotional well-being (Langton & Berger, 2011). It is known that adolescents from broken homes suffer behavioural problems (Aboh *et al*., 2014). Therefore, coherence and stability of a family is a crucial aspect that influences adolescent behaviour, as children from stable or intact households are more likely to develop strong moral values compared to those from broken homes (Adebayo, 2020). Lack of supervision of adolescent children and stress on the parents can be a possible reason for behavioural problem.

The economic status of parents was a significant predictor of behavioural issues in secondary school adolescents in this study. This result suggests that the economic circumstances of parents, whether affluent or impoverished, play a crucial role in determining whether their children will engage in behavioural problems. The finding is in agreement with Hamid and Nawi (2013) who reported that children who grow up in economic hardship have many challenges including health, cognitive issues, poor academic performance, emotional and behavioural problems. A similar study reported by Ekpo and Ajake (2013) aligns with the result of this study on social and economic wellbeing of parents that significantly influenced students' delinquent behaviours. Their results showed that students from poor socio-economic background were more delinquent than students whose parents have a high socio-economic status. This study collaborates with a study

that adolescents from a low economic background displayed more behavioural problems than

those from high socioeconomic class and that poverty correlates significantly with adolescent violence (Ughasoro *et al*., 2021). These results highlight the significance of good family income for adolescent well-being in general.

The result showed that home training is a significant predictor of behavioural issues of adolescents attending secondary schools. The type of home training a child received influences his or her behaviours in the school. It implied that children that received poor or bad home training stand the chance to show negative and antisocial behaviours and vice versa. The results agreed with Hasan and Husain (2016) who documented that the behaviour of an adolescent is influenced by the home and the environment he is raised from due to economic factors affecting parents as the adolescents display high frequency of violence in the school and exhibit same at home. Early studies reported high association of parenting practice, inconsistent discipline at home with variety of risky behaviours of students (de Looze *et al*., 2012; Aboobaker *et al*., 2019). Adolescents that lack appropriate parenting and home guidance are more likely to engage in antisocial and deviant behaviours (Nwobodo, 2021). Therefore, appropriate home training will reduce behavioural problems associated with adolescents.

The result showed that educational level of parents is a significant predictor of behavioural issues of young adults in secondary schools. The present result agrees with previous studies that parental education is associated with a variety of outcomes such as academic performance, mental health and adolescents' behavioural problems (Omoruyi, 2014; Mikkonen et al., 2020). In line with this finding, Schmuck (2011) reported that children from high educational status had a positive physical and emotional well-being with low behavioural problem such as bullying. Parents with high level of education had children with low scores of aggressive behaviours (Cabello *et al*, 2017). Therefore, the level of formal education can be used to predict whether or not the children of such parents will exhibit some behavioural problems. Parent's education level was the strongest predictor probably due to better access to educational resources, cognitive stimulation and modelling techniques. Parental education has been associated with psychological wellbeing, mental disorder and academic achievement of adolescents (Schlechter & Milevsky, 2010; Mikkonen *et al*., 2020). Parents who are highly educated are aware of the changes that are associated with adolescence and can therefore understand and manage the stress associated with this stage of development (Shirzadi et al., 2025).

Limitation of the Study

This study has some limitations. Firstly, our study design was cross-sectional which cannot infer causality and use of self-report questionnaires that depended on the responses of the adolescents which is prone to biases. Another limitation is the high multicollinearity among predictors, which limits interpretation of the unique effect and the use of researcher-made instrument. It is not possible to rule out other environmental factors that can predict behavioural

problems of adolescents. Despite the likelihood to believe that home variables can predict adolescent behaviour, other factors cannot be ignored. Moreover, we could not test the relationship between home variables separately for males and female adolescents. There is therefore need to conduct such test in future studies.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore home-related factors as predictors of behavioural issues in adolescents attending secondary schools. It is concluded that parents' marital status, family dynamics, parental economic status, home training, and parental educational attainment were significant predictors of behavioural issues among adolescents in secondary schools. Parent's education level was the strongest predictor of behaviour problems of adolescents attending secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. A focus on family-based intervention will help to curb adolescent behavioural problems as they transit into adulthood.

Recommendations

According to the results and conclusions of the research, the following suggestions were proposed:

Parents should provide their children with sufficient home education that can help develop these children with minimal or no behavioural issues. They should be given adequate counselling on maintaining stable homes and marriage that will not give room for divorce and broken home.

The finding implies that school counsellors should work together with classroom teachers to recognize students experiencing behavioural issues for suitable counselling. Qualified counsellors should be hired in adequate numbers for each school to support students with behavioural challenges.

School management should create time for informing parents on the method of managing behaviour problems of children. In addition, training and workshops should be made to parents and guardians on adolescents' behavioural problems in Akwa Ibom State and the ways to solve these problems.

Government should implement a policy that emphasizes the importance of guidance and counselling services in addition to providing functional counselling centres to handle guidance and counselling support services in every secondary school in the State.

Government and proprietors of private schools should organize seminars and workshops for the teachers and school counsellors on effective ways of identifying and counselling adolescents with behavioural problems. In addition, government should increase the funding of education and provide reading materials to schools and students. This will assist students from poor economic background who may not be able to afford these school materials.

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CONFLICT AMONG COUPLES IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the effectiveness of marital counselling in resolving conflict among couples in Abia State. Quasi-experimental design was adopted for the study. The sample was 100 spouses. 50 spouses consisting of 25 males and 25 females were assigned to experimental group (treatment) while 50 spouses consisting of 25 males and 25 females were assigned to the control group. Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (CRQ) was used to elicit responses from the respondents. The instrument was trial tested using 20 couples and the results analyzed using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.79. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to answer the research question, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that marital counselling had significant effect on couples' conflict resolution. The study recommended that: Spouses should be encouraged to exercise patience to avoid conflict, given that conflicts in marriage are inevitable, but they can be minimized through tolerance and accommodative spirit.

Keywords: Couples, Resolving Conflict, Marital Counselling

Introduction

In every family, conflict is inevitable. Conflict resolution refers to the ability of couple to tolerate each other when they differ in their opinions. Despite the disagreement in their opinions, they are expected to be patient and accommodate one another for their common good. Many families today hardly manage marital conflicts. This has caused some setback probably as a result of lack of marital counselling. Marital counselling is expected to help the troubled couples to resolve their conflicts amicably. Gottman (2020) posited that no matter how hard two people try to love and please each other, they might fail. Their failure can lead to hurting their relationship. The only ultimate relief for hurt is the soothing salve of forgiveness. This can be done or achieved through marital counselling. Partners with fewer areas of difference and incompatibility may have more successful relationships. Most people would answer true, but this is at least a partial misconception. All couples have areas of difference and incompatibility to greater and lesser degrees. (Baucom, Shoham, Mueseer, Daiuto & Stickle, 2023).

Everyone knows that opposite attracts which simply means that people are often drawn to those who are different from them Differences can be very interesting and stimulating in one's partner. People seek partners who can complement their style with some of their strengths. The socially active partner brings something valuable to a relationship with the partner whose interests are more domestic and vice versa. Bradbury, Rogge and Lawrence (2021) are of the opinion that differences are not so conflictual in the early stages of relationships. So, couples do not pay that much attention to them. Couples focus on similarities, as they are absorbed in getting to know each other. They may be very excited and enthralled by some of their differences as well as their commonalities. As relationships progress, similarities become more familiar and less novel. When the couple moves into practical relationship tasks like advancing their careers, starting and raising a family, and managing finances become more apparent and prominent. Sex, finances and chores are the most common focal areas of conflict, although more important differences often lie elsewhere. Bradbury et al. (2021) further informed that couples with more differences have different styles of marriage than couples that are more similar in outlook. But they can be just as happy or even happier. Couples who have a successful 'volatile' relationship style can tolerate more areas of difference. Their conflicts just seem to offer more opportunity to kiss and make up. At the other end of the spectrum are successful 'avoidant' couples. They know what areas of steer clear off with their partner and accept this arrangement. But avoidance only works well when differences are not too critical and there are large areas of common ground. What is important is not so much the degree or type of difference. It is how couples manage their areas of difference and incompatibility and whether their relationship style is appropriate for the degree and type of differences and similarities that they have. It is especially important that they take advantage of their areas of similarity to maintain a positive emotional tone. Couples must avoid becoming stuck in trying to convert their partners to adopt their view point (Finchman, & Beach, 2024).

If couples allow differences to disrupt the sense of mutuality in a relationship, it may lead to

disinvestments or lives that are too separate, that is big trouble. When couples split up, they often

attribute it to overwhelming incompatibility. They become overwhelmed by their differences, not just because they have them, but because they never learned to manage them constructively. Many couples are blindsided by their differences as their relationship advances beyond the more exclusively romantic early stages, because they never systematically explored their expectations and differences and adopted strategies to accommodate them. Couples who understand, prepare and plan for their areas of incompatibility are less disconcerted and generally fare better. They may have more realistic expectations and know what they are signing on for.

In the long run, the challenge of difference will be an impetus to growth in both partners. Learning to support and validate yourself independently will help you to manage more successfully to your relationship's areas of difference and incompatibility, especially when these lead to conflict. Of course, we all rely on our partner for emotional support. It is one of the best things about being in a relationship. The time we need support the most is when we are in conflict with our partner. And when one can't get support from them. This can magnify the distress: not only ones in a stressful conflict, but one is also deprived of principal sources of support. No wonder one can feel so disappointed and angry when these conflicts arise. This deprivation is typically more acute for men, since they often rely more exclusively on their partner for their emotional support system. Women's support systems tend to be more diverse. If couples know about this dynamic and expect it, they will be better equipped to turn it into an opportunity for growth (Fincham & Beach, 2024).

Budbury et al (2021) further expressed that partners who are less well prepared to support themselves may turn the conflict into a fight or may give in to avoid one. It's very important to the success of a marriage relationship that partners learn to adequately support and validate themselves, so they can deal productively with conflict with their partner without putting aside their own vital needs and interests. Every couple needs a sense of security and a mature perspective to understand themselves well enough to know when to compromise with the partner and when they have to stand their ground. Personal strength and a strong, non-defensive sense of identity help one to tolerate their anxiety while the partner goes through this same process.

The demands of a long-term, committed marriage relationship guide people toward developing these qualities. Few people bring this personal strength to their new marriage fully formed, and it doesn't happen overnight. This is one of the reasons why many marriages go through and brought patch early on while the partners are growing and developing their self-support and self-validation. Marital counselling, according to Rush, Barry, Hertel and Swain (2022), helps couples to understand their areas of similarity and difference, which are to be expected in every relationship. More importantly, it teaches strategy and skill options for managing these in accord with different relationship styles and helps couples to protect the mutuality and positive emotional tone of their relationship. It also guides couples in building a marriage that supports and thrives on their individual strengths and identities.

Thornton (2022) considered some areas of life where there are likely to be some conflicts

between the most 'compatible' partners: neatness versus messiness, caution and thrift versus expansiveness and risk-taking, promptness versus tardiness, more versus less sociability, different career demands. It is not very surprising that conflict and control can be one of the most puzzling and difficult aspects of relationship facing many couples. Since all couples-even those who have been happily married for years-have five to seven areas of irresolvable differences, how couples handle and decide whose approach will prevail is critical to marriage success. Managing control issues is one of the principal challenges of married life. Skill-based programmes such as marital counselling can help most couples to understand and control issues and to develop new communications and conflict resolution strategies that can enable them to take a healthy, intentional and constructive approach to conflict. Failure to take a positive, proactive approach to conflict and control can result in all kinds of problems: Frequent conflicts will negatively drive up relationships or conflict may be avoided through compliance or disengagement by one or both partners, depriving the relationship of essential mutuality. Each can put a relationship at a risk over the long run (Bradbury et al, 2021).

This second problem contributes to the most common destructive pattern in male-female relationships: the pursue withdraw syndrome, where one partner (usually the woman) keeps approaching the other about an important need or problem, while the other becomes overloaded and withdraws or superficially complies. The pursuing partner may become more frustrated, which may lead her to increase the pressure, while the withdrawer becomes more overwhelmed by it, and may resort to fight or to escape. Both partners feel caught in a terrible web that just keeps replaying.

Thornton (2022) added that when problems are chronic and entrenched, things may seem to follow the same repeating scripts, which may cause serious trouble. Partners who enter marriage with a need may have their own way on most decisions and, especially those who need to have their partner's agreement on most things, can be heading for trouble in their marriage. Partners who manage conflict always by avoiding or giving-in, are also putting their relationship at risk. When control is a problem, it's usually because one or both partners have difficulty finding the middle ground. In most cases, these tendencies may result from early upbringing of the partner. Parents need to learn to stand up for their needs in a relationship, which means learning to tolerate their own feelings about their partner's reactions. A certain amount of self-support and self-validation is required. Of course, it is when one disagrees that one cannot expect validation to come from his or her partner. So if one doesn't have an alternate source of support, one is more likely to give in too early. A chronic need to be in control and have one's way on most things is often related to underlying insecurities that sometimes have origins deep in one's early childhood experiences. Likewise, always giving in can reflect a different response to similar issues. Paradoxically, for the control oriented person learning to give up some control can be the key to getting more of what we want and need in relationships. If one has difficulty modifying chronic complaints or controlling behaviour, one may find individual counselling helpful in exploring and

resolving underlying insecurities.

Sometimes, one or both partners need to learn to tolerate differences that cannot be resolved easily. This means putting such differences aside for a time, once efforts to arrive at a compromise have been exhausted. Couples cannot always agree on every issue (Orbuch, 2022). It is noted that over the years, instability in families has been on the increase among many families leading to couples either staying apart or outrightly seeking divorce. For many of these cases, such instability may be salvaged if marital counselling services are readily available. The problem may be traced to numerous factors such as control over money, ignorance over sexual relationship, giving birth to only female children, childlessness, polygamy, single parenting, poor communication among others, these factors may lead many families into conflict and make such families to live in sorrow, loneliness, calamity, chaos, anxiety among others which is not healthy for such families, the church and the larger society. Orubo (2022) reported that the people felt the trend is ugly and does damage to the social structure and part of the major problems that threaten the stability and growth of the nation. The society has witnessed a great increase in the rate of separation, divorce, marital dissatisfaction and loss of affection between couples. For instance, in Abia State, Abu (2022) reported that from 2018-2024, 1,243 marriages were dissolved, while 7,264 cases were recorded from 2018-2022 at the Upper Area Court 1 in Umuahia, Abia State. This is why the issue of unstable family has been a thing of concern among families in Abia State. The researcher anticipates that integrating rational emotive behaviour therapy in the treatment plan may enhance academic self-confidence among the students thereby aid in improving academic self-efficacy among in-school adolescent in the study area irrespective of gender. However, the researchers are not aware of any study on effectiveness of counselling in resolving marital conflict in the study area. In the present study, the researcher intends to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of marital counselling in resolving conflict among couples in Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

Marital stability is a vital component of societal well-being, and effective conflict resolution mechanisms play a crucial role in maintaining the longevity of marital unions. In the diverse and dynamic context of Abia State, Nigeria, where cultural, economic, and social factors intersect, there exists a pressing need to comprehend the specific challenges faced by couples in resolving conflicts within their marriages. Despite the recognition of the importance of conflict resolution, there remains a gap in understanding which strategy are most effective in fostering marriage stability in this distinct socio-cultural environment. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the prevalent marital conflicts experienced by couples in Abia State and examining the approaches currently employed for conflict resolution. The overarching goal is to delineate the effectiveness of various conflict resolution mechanisms and identify any cultural or contextual nuances influencing their impact on marital stability. By delving into these aspects, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform targeted interventions and support systems

tailored to the unique dynamics of marriages in Abia State, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of marital stability in the metropolis.

Purpose of the Study

Specifically the objectives of the study was to:

- determine the difference in the mean ratings of experimental and control groups on conflict resolution by couples in Abia State.

Research Question

One research question was raised and answered.

- What is the difference in the mean ratings of experimental and control groups on conflict resolution by couples?

Hypothesis

One hypothesis was formulated and tested at0.05 level of significance:

Ho_1: There is no significant difference in mean ratings of couples' conflict resolution between experimental and control groups.

Research Method

The research design adopted for this study was quasi-experimental design based on non-randomized control group, pre-test post-test design also known as nonequivalent control group design. The researchers employed the pre-test and post-test approach because the strategy usually attempts to answer cause-and-effect questions about the relationship between two variables, and the strategy does not produce ambiguous explanations (Ali, 2006).

The population of the study comprised 500,000 (500,000) spouses who are members of Roman Catholic Church in Umuahia and Aba, Abia State. (Catholic Records and Statistics 2024). A sample of one hundred (100) spouses comprising 50 males and 50 females were sampled for the study. One hundred (100) spouses were used for the study because it was difficult to get spouses, even though more spouses were invited and requested to participate in the study as required. Purposive sampling technique through intact group was used to select the respondents who were willing to participate in the training. This type of sampling allows the researcher to state the characteristics or conditions satisfied by subjects for inclusion in the study. These characteristics or conditions were such that the purpose of the study could be accomplished.

Specifically, 50 spouses consisting of 25 males and 25 females were assigned to experimental group (treatment), while 50 spouses consisting of 25 males and 25 females were assigned to the control group (not exposed to treatment). The researchers constructed the instrument titled Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (CRQ). The questionnaire was 30 item instrument divided into two sections. Section A contained personal data of the respondents, while Section B contained effect of marital counselling on conflict resolution. The CRQ was presented on a four-point rating scale type of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) weighing 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

The initial draft of CRQ accompanied with the purpose of the study, research question and hypothesis was subjected to face and content validation by three research experts in experts in Guidance and Counselling. The experts examined the items and established the suitability, language construction, coverage, clarity, and relevance of the instrument. The experts' comments,

suggestion and corrections were effected to produce the final draft of the instrument. The reliability estimate of CRQ was established through split half method (Cronbach alpha method). The scores obtained were arranged even and odd members for analysis using Cronbach alpha statistics which yielded a reliability index of 0.79 indicating the usability of the instrument for the present study.

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools of mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. In answering the research questions, the study considered the mean ratings of control and experimental groups on each of the indices of the study to determine the difference in the mean ratings. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypothesis. This was to justify that it removed the effect of intervening variables or stabilize independent variables to the point that their effects cannot be unduly influenced by intervening variables (unwanted variables). It also takes care of lack of equivalence in mean scores of pretest of both experimental and control groups in all the indices of the study.

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) is based on some assumptions, which include the following: Homogeneity of variance, mutual exclusiveness and independence of observation which may in other words be termed as random selection and homogeneity of regression or similarity of slope of the regression lines for each experimental group. Where the observed value was less than the significant (P) value (0.05) the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the directional alternative hypothesis at 0.05 level of significant and the vice versa.

A description of the marital counselling skills and a methodological outline of the session activities for the group were briefly stated below:

Marital Counselling Skills (MCS)

Session One: Initial Counselling Establishment Issues**:** This session commenced with initial counselling establishment issue of rapport building. The issues of confidentiality, roles and other responsibilities of the counsellor and clients, need to remain in therapy, need to provide essential information required for progress in therapy among others were discussed.

Session Two: Goal Setting: This session commenced with motivational activities which were followed with review of their tasks and assignments. The subjects were guided to set goals of general and specific nature.

Session Three: Active Listening**:** This session started with motivational matters followed by the review of the previous sessions' activities; assignments and tasks as well as reinforcing them for their efforts. Adequate feedbacks were provided. It was reviewed and discussed by the researcher and subjects. Subject demonstrating genuine attention to each partner. Using verbal and non-verbal cues

(nodding, eye contact, summarizing). Ensuring each person feels heard and understood.

Session Four: Empathy: This therapy session commenced with the motivational issues with the subjects. This was followed by a review on the activities of last session. The tasks and assignment given to the subjects in the last session were reviewed and discussed by the researcher and

subjects. Understanding and validating each partner's emotions without judgment. Reflecting feelings: It sounds like you felt ignored when that happened. Adequate feedback was provided.

Session Five: Feedback: This session commenced with verification of their progress report followed with review of their tasks and assignments given to them in the last session such as listening, observation and requesting.

Session Six: Rehearsal of Marital Counselling Skills: The session started with the motivational issues of subjects. It was followed by receiving of assignments of previous sessions as well as reinforcements of the efforts of the subjects.

The results obtained are presented as shown:

Research Question: What is the difference in the mean ratings of experimental and control groups on conflict resolution by couples?

Results

Table 1: *The Mean Ratings of Experimental and Control Groups on Conflict Resolution by Couples*

Source of Variation	Experimental and control groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Conflict resolution by Couples	Experimental group	2.4000	.58414	50
	Control group	2.3240	.47102	50
	Difference	**0.076**		
Post conflict Resolution	Experimental group	3.5040	.48190	50
	Control group	2.8080	.63111	50
	Difference	**0.696**		

Table 1 indicated that before the commencement of the treatment, both groups have similar mean on conflict resolution by couples (2.40 & 2.32) with little difference of 0.076. After treatment, experimental group had mean on conflict resolution as 3.50 with standard deviation of .48 while the control group had 2.81 with standard deviation of .6 3. The mean difference of 0.696 is in favour of the experimental group. This implied that marital counselling was effective on conflict resolution by couples.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of conflict resolution between experimental and control groups.

Table 2: *Dependent Variable: Post conflict resolution*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	Sig

			Squares		
Corrected Model	12.171a	2	6.085	19.143	.000
Intercept	50.279	1	50.279	158.162	.000
Pre-conflict resolve	.060	1	.060	.190	.664
Group	12.171	1	12.171	38.285	.000
Error	30.836	97	.318		
Total	1039.040	100			
Corrected	43.006	99			

R Squared = .283 (Adjusted R Squared = .268)

Table 2 indicated that F =38.285, df =1 and p. =.000. With p<0.05, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of conflict resolution between experimental and control groups by couples was rejected. This implied that the difference in the mean rating scores between the experimental group and control group of couples' conflict resolution was significant. The couples in experimental group who were exposed to marital counselling principles obtained high mean scores than the couples in control group who were not exposed to marital counselling principles. This showed that marital counselling had significant effect on conflict resolution by couples.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of this study is discussed in line with the research question and hypothesis of the study. The study indicated that marital counselling has significant effect on couples conflict resolution in Abia State. This finding corroborates with Tartakovsku (2022) and Lin (2024) that marital counselling helped couples to handle conflicts with the spirit of tolerance thereby resulting to their good mental health. It also revealed that conflict resolution is an important predictor of marital relationship and satisfaction. The reason for this finding could be that the spouses in the experimental group value and utilize the principles gotten from martial counselling such as tolerance, accommodative spirit, knowing and adjusting to differences, pursing other person for reconciliation, forgiveness and resolution. The spouses were exposed to marital counselling principles or model such as calling partners' attention to discuss together, finding out the actual demand or need, giving necessary attention to partner, assuring partner of true love and answering partners respectfully in public, were sufficient indications of marital counselling models that usually enhance the attitude of conflict resolution among spouses.

Conclusion

It has been observed in the study area that families have suffered some degrees of conflict resolution. But the present study has established the fact that marital counselling model is

effective in improving conflict resolution in Abia State. It implied that lack of marital counselling is related to family problem in the study area.

Recommendation

Based on the finding of this study, a recommendation is proposed, thus: that spouses should be helped to imbibe the virtue of patience given that conflicts in marriage are inevitable but can be minimized through tolerance and accommodative spirit.

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ROLE OF DIALOGUE IN RESOLVING MARITAL CONFLICTS AMONG COUPLES IN IREPODUN L.G.A, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of family life, as every couple is bound to experience varying degrees of differences, misunderstandings, and incompatibilities due to individual backgrounds, expectations, values, and communication patterns. When such conflicts are poorly managed, they may escalate into emotional distress, communication breakdown, estrangement, and, ultimately, the dissolution of marriages. This study investigated the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun Local Government Area of Kwara State. A descriptive survey design was adopted and data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Marital Conflict and Dialogue Resolution Questionnaire" (MCDRQ) with 15 items. The instrument was subjected to validation. Its reliability was established using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.84. A total of 364 respondents were sampled for the study. The data collected were analysed using percentages, t-test, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that majority of the respondents affirmed that dialogue plays a significant role in resolving marital conflicts. The study found no significant difference in the role of dialogue based on respondents' religion, length of marriage, or ethnicity, suggesting that the impact of dialogue in marital conflict resolution is generally consistent across these demographic factors. Based on the findings, it was recommended that professional counsellors and religious institutions should organise periodic workshops and seminars aimed at equipping couples with effective communication and conflict resolution skills. These programmes should include practical activities like role-playing, communication exercises, and emotional regulation training.

Keywords: Dialogue, Marital Conflicts, Marital Conflict Resolution, Couples, Irepodun Local Government Area

Introduction

The institution of marriage in Nigeria is undergoing a significant transformation, shifting from its traditional foundation to a more complex and often unstable structure. What was once considered a sacred and enduring union is now increasingly characterised by persistent domestic tensions. Marital conflicts, previously perceived as occasional or circumstantial, have become widespread and, in some cases, deeply entrenched. This growing instability can be attributed, in part, to a rising tendency among couples to enter marriage based on transient emotional attraction or superficial compatibility, while neglecting critical elements such as shared values, financial readiness, and long-term social compatibility (Gautam, 2023). It was observed that in the early phases of romantic relationships, differences between partners are often downplayed, as the couple focuses more on mutual attraction and perceived similarities but as the relationship matures and the couple face real-life challenges, such as career pressures, economic responsibilities, and parenting, their underlying differences become more pronounced, often leading to increased interpersonal tension and conflict (Adjei, 2023; Gautam, 2023). These developments highlight the pressing need for constructive approaches, such as effective dialogue, in navigating marital challenges and sustaining stable unions.

Effectively addressing marital conflict requires recognising the variety of resolution strategies available, many of which traditionally involve the extended family and wider community networks. In many Nigerian communities, family elders, religious leaders, and kinship structures play central roles in mediating disputes. While these culturally embedded mechanisms have their merits, conflicts that are mishandled or trivialised at this level often escalate into deeper emotional distress, chronic resentment, or even domestic violence. At such critical junctures, the intervention of professional counsellors becomes not just beneficial, but essential (Afolabi, 2024). Counsellor-facilitated dialogue offers a structured, non-adversarial space for both partners to express their concerns, reflect on underlying issues, and work toward practical, emotionally intelligent solutions. This therapeutic process fosters mutual understanding, de-escalates tension, and encourages healthier communication patterns (Ayatallah & Guessous, 2023). Moreover, institutionalising counsellor-led mediation as a routine response to marital disputes could significantly reduce the pressure on Nigeria's judicial system while promoting conflict resolution approaches that are both effective and culturally congruent (Bhuraney & Bhagi, 2024).

Elegbede, Abidogun, Mumuni, and Kuponiyi (2024) underscore the importance of marital counselling in fostering deeper understanding between spouses. They argue that effective counselling enables couples to recognise and navigate both their inherent similarities and differences - factors that are not only natural but also vital to the growth of any marital

relationship. While shared values and interests often contribute to initial compatibility, it is the respectful management of differences that sustains long-term marital stability. Counselling provides couples with practical, context-sensitive tools and communication strategies that are tailored to their personalities, relational styles, and socio-cultural backgrounds. It empowers them to express emotions constructively, manage stress, and resolve disputes in ways that preserve

dignity, empathy, and shared commitment.

According to Cardwell (2019), counselling interventions are particularly effective when they address the emotional climate of the relationship - encouraging openness, emotional validation, and mutual respect. These interventions often focus on equipping couples with the psychological resources needed to build trust, improve communication, and cultivate resilience in the face of life's inevitable challenges. By fostering emotional safety and reinforcing positive behavioural patterns, counselling becomes a powerful preventive and corrective tool in managing marital conflict. One of the most effective and widely taught techniques in marital counselling is dialogue. Dialogue, in this context, goes beyond casual conversation. It is a structured, intentional, and respectful process of communication that enables both partners to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and concerns in a non-confrontational manner. Through dialogue, couples are encouraged to listen actively, validate each other's perspectives, and collaboratively explore solutions. This process creates space for empathy, reduces defensiveness, and opens pathways for reconciliation and mutual growth.

The centrality of dialogue in conflict resolution is widely acknowledged in both Western and African marital therapy models. As a communication tool, dialogue allows for emotional ventilation, clarification of misunderstandings, and the negotiation of differences, all of which are crucial in preventing the escalation of conflict into emotional trauma, hostility, or marital breakdown. Research indicates that when dialogue is facilitated by trained counsellors, it becomes even more impactful, offering a safe environment where power imbalances can be addressed and emotionally charged issues can be explored without fear of judgment or retaliation (Ayatallah & Guessous, 2023; Bhuraney & Bhagi, 2024).

The use of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts is deeply embedded in both formal counselling practices and traditional conflict mediation. However, its application is often influenced by a range of socio-cultural factors, including religious doctrines, patriarchal gender norms, and community-based expectations. For example, in many Yoruba communities, dialogue is traditionally mediated by extended family members, religious leaders, or respected elders who are seen as custodians of marital values. While such interventions have their strengths, they may lack the neutrality or confidentiality offered by professional counsellors. Elegbede et al. (2024) note that integrating traditional support systems with professional counselling approaches, particularly those that emphasise structured dialogue, can yield more sustainable and culturally responsive outcomes in marital conflict resolution. Ultimately, promoting counsellor-led dialogue as a routine component of marital support services can contribute to healthier, more resilient

relationships. Moreover, this approach contributes to normalizing professional intervention in conflict resolution, thereby alleviating pressure on the judicial system by settling disputes prior to their escalation into litigation or irreversible separation and as such, dialogue emerges not only as a technique but as a transformative process that strengthens the emotional fabric of marriages.

Afolabi (2024) and Kofoworola and Rofiu (2024) assert that the involvement of professional

counsellors in mediating marital disputes is not only beneficial but essential. Unlike informal mediators, such as family elders or religious figures professional counsellors are trained to address both individual and relational dynamics with objectivity, empathy, and clinical insight. Their interventions are guided by established psychological theories and evidence-based practices, which allow them to deliver structured and informed approaches to conflict resolution. This professional expertise enables counsellors to dig beneath surface-level disagreements and explore deeper emotional issues that often fuel marital conflict, such as unmet needs, unresolved trauma, communication breakdowns, and mismatched expectations.

One of the most significant contributions of counsellors lies in their use of non-legal and non-adversarial interventions, such as therapeutic dialogue, couple counselling, and psycho education. These interventions help couples reflect on their behavioural patterns, challenge destructive narratives, and develop healthier interaction styles. Through guided dialogue, counsellors facilitate safe and intentional communication that encourages emotional openness, active listening, and mutual validation, tools that are indispensable in preventing the recurrence of conflict and promoting long-term relational harmony (Uzoka & Onah, 2024). Counsellor's role extends beyond resolving disputes to fostering psychological well-being within the marital unit. Counsellors help couples navigate identity shifts, life transitions, and external stressors, such as financial hardship or parenting challenges, that often exacerbate conflict. In doing so, they not only restore relational balance but also empower couples with lifelong skills for managing disagreements in a constructive and respectful manner.

Conflict is an inherent aspect of family life, as all couples, regardless of background or compatibility, are bound to encounter disagreements, misunderstandings, and relational tensions over time (Ibitoye, 2024). These conflicts may arise from a range of factors, including breakdowns in communication, diverging personal values, unmet emotional or sexual expectations, financial strain, or the influence of external forces such as in-laws, peer groups, or societal pressures. While some conflicts are minor and situational, others may be more persistent and emotionally charged, threatening the stability of the marital relationship if not addressed constructively (Afolabi, 2024; Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto, & Stickle, 2013).

The ability to manage and resolve conflict is therefore crucial to sustaining a healthy marital union. Conflict resolution requires more than mere tolerance, it involves a conscious willingness by both partners to understand each other's perspectives, negotiate differences, and accommodate individual needs in pursuit of relational harmony. This skill is becoming increasingly essential,

especially in contemporary society where traditional marital support systems are weakening and many couples lack access to structured marital counselling (Dalhatu & Muhammad, 2024). Without such support, unresolved conflicts may accumulate, leading to emotional detachment, chronic resentment, and, in some cases, separation or divorce.

Communication, particularly in the form of dialogue, plays a central role in conflict

resolution. Adegboyega (2021) found that open, respectful, and purposeful communication significantly enhance couples' ability to resolve disputes. His study indicated that when partners communicate effectively and demonstrate mutual empathy and respect, they are more likely to navigate conflicts constructively and preserve emotional intimacy. Conversely, when communication is poor, characterised by defensiveness, criticism, or avoidance, conflicts often escalate due to misinterpretations and perceptual biases. This reinforces the need for targeted interventions, such as professional counselling, where couples are taught dialogue-based strategies for managing conflict in healthy and sustainable ways. Dialogue, in this sense, is not merely about verbal exchange, it is a relational process that fosters mutual understanding, emotional regulation, and collaborative problem-solving. When integrated into marital counselling sessions, dialogue serves as both a preventive and therapeutic mechanism that can mitigate the intensity of conflict and promote deeper relational connection. As marital relationships continue to evolve amidst societal change, the capacity to engage in meaningful dialogue will remain a cornerstone of marital stability and well-being.

In Nigeria, although Islam and Christianity constitute the dominant religious frameworks, the institution of marriage remains deeply rooted in indigenous cultural and traditional practices. Consequently, marital conflicts are rarely treated as private affairs confined to the couple alone; rather, they often extend to involve the extended family, community elders, and even religious leaders. In many cases, conflict resolution becomes a communal responsibility, reflecting the collectivist ethos prevalent in Nigerian society. While this communal approach can offer valuable support, it also has the potential to worsen tensions if handled with bias, secrecy, or a lack of psychological insight. When poorly managed, such conflicts can escalate into emotional distress, physical abuse, and ultimately, separation or divorce (Afolabi, 2024). Beyond the formal judicial system, which is often viewed as adversarial and emotionally detached, traditional African societies have long embraced more relational and culturally embedded forms of conflict resolution. These alternative systems emphasize dialogue, reconciliation, and social harmony rather than legal punishment or blame.

According to Okesina (2022), in many Yoruba communities, including those in Kwara State, the formal court system is frequently avoided in marital matters due to its perceived coldness and the stigma it can attach to families. In fact, one of the well-known proverbs within Yoruba marital discourse is: *"A kìí ti k'óòtù dé, ká tún sọ̀rẹ́"* translated as "You cannot take me to court and expect us to remain friends afterward." This reflects a deep cultural belief that judicial intervention often damages the relational fabric of marriage, making reconciliation difficult, if not

impossible. Literature suggests that over-reliance on litigation has contributed to the breakdown of many marriages, especially where alternative, dialogue-oriented approaches were overlooked. As such, community-based and counsellor-led interventions, which emphasize open dialogue and mutual understanding, are increasingly being recommended as more humane, efficient, and culturally appropriate models for resolving marital conflict in Nigeria. These methods not only

save couples from prolonged legal battles but also align with traditional values of peace, forgiveness, and restoration.

In many instances of marital conflict, dialogue, particularly when grounded in effective listening and structured communication, plays a critical role in de-escalating tension and restoring relational balance. Dialogue, in this context, entails more than casual conversation; it involves attentive listening, the honest expression of thoughts and emotions, clarification of misunderstandings, and the pursuit of common ground. When one partner listens attentively, without interrupting, judging, or prematurely responding, it creates an environment where the other feels heard, respected, and emotionally validated. This sense of validation significantly reduces defensiveness and fosters openness, allowing both partners to engage more honestly and empathetically (Afolabi, 2024).

Afolabi (2024) and Okesina (2022) further assert that when couples focus on understanding what is being said, rather than formulating counterarguments or preparing rebuttals, they are more likely to uncover the root causes of their disputes, rather than merely reacting to surface-level triggers. This shift in focus reduces miscommunication, diffuses emotional intensity, and facilitates more grounded, constructive dialogue. Active and empathetic listening can also pre-empt the escalation of conflict by neutralising anger and frustration before they become unmanageable. In essence, attentive listening creates a psychologically safe environment in which both partners can express their vulnerabilities without fear of blame or dismissal. This not only strengthens emotional intimacy but also promotes more stable and enduring relationships. Similarly, structured communication has been shown to significantly improve post-conflict satisfaction among couples. Unlike spontaneous or emotionally reactive exchanges, structured communication is intentional and organised, providing a clear framework for dialogue. It encourages both partners to take turns, listen actively, and express themselves using non-confrontational language. Techniques such as using "I" statements (e.g., “I feel hurt when…”), turn-taking, paraphrasing, and setting mutually agreed ground rules are central to this approach (Szczesma, 2024). These tools help keep discussions focused on the issue at hand, rather than descending into blame, personal attacks, or emotional withdrawal.

Structured communication promotes clarity, respect, and emotional safety, which are critical components of successful conflict resolution. Oliveira (2023) highlights that when couples use structured dialogue, they are less likely to engage in destructive behaviours such as yelling, name-calling, stonewalling, or shutting down emotionally, patterns that can severely damage relational trust. Instead, structured dialogue fosters empathy, mutual accountability, and cooperation, ultimately enabling couples to arrive at solutions that are both equitable and emotionally

satisfying. When applied consistently, this method strengthens communication patterns and builds the emotional resilience needed to navigate future conflicts with confidence and maturity.

Structured communication also fosters reflection and emotional regulation, enabling couples to remain calm, respectful, and composed even when navigating disagreements. By slowing down emotionally charged exchanges, it allows partners to process their feelings, consider the impact of

their words, and approach problem-solving more constructively. This method not only diffuses immediate tension but also builds essential interpersonal skills that enhance a couple's capacity to manage future conflicts with greater maturity and empathy (Girma, 2024). When marital disputes are resolved through structured communication, both partners are more likely to feel emotionally validated, respected, and heard, factors that are strongly linked to increased relational satisfaction and long-term stability. Moreover, such dialogue lays a foundation of trust and emotional safety, which helps couples face future challenges with a unified and cooperative spirit (Afolabi, 2024; Okesina, 2022). Building on this foundation, the present study investigates the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among Nigerian couples, with specific attention to those residing in Irepodun Local Government Area of Kwara State.

Statement of the Problem

Marriage in Nigeria is increasingly undermined by a persistent communication crisis, what often begins as minor misunderstandings escalates into destructive disputes, emotional disconnection, and, in some cases, domestic violence or divorce. Empirical studies confirm that ineffective communication significantly predicts marital conflict. Elom, Ilo, and Ojide (2023) found that among married civil servants in Ebonyi State, couples with poor communication reported significantly higher conflict levels (explaining approximately 7% of variance in marital discord). Similarly, Onyekuru (2022) observed a strong positive correlation between communication strategies and marital stability among couples in Southeast Nigeria. Despite highlighting the centrality of communication, these studies do not explore the *mechanisms* of conflict resolution, such as active listening, structured dialogue, and emotional validation, that can de-escalate conflict and nurture marital resilience. Adegboyega (2021), examining married adults in Ilorin, Kwara State, reported that effective communication significantly reduces misunderstandings and enhances respect, while poor communication leads to perceptual distortions. However, this research did not delve into how specific dialogue techniques could be systematically integrated into counselling interventions. Another study by Ajibola, Tiamiyu, and Abidoye (2024) revealed that assertive and passive communication styles correlate positively with marital stability in Kwara State, yet it did not examine structured or culturally moderated dialogue strategies. Some gaps revealed from these studies include a lack of empirical insight into how structured dialogue such as turn-taking, emotional validation, and guided listening, resolves conflict. To address these deficiencies, this study investigates the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among Nigerian couples, with specific attention to those residing in Irepodun Local Government Area of Kwara State.

Research Question

1. What is the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria based on religion.
2. There is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria based on length of years in marriage.
3. There is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria based on ethnicity.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Irepodun Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. The administrative headquarters is located in Omu-Aran, and the area spans approximately 3,435 square kilometers. The inhabitants are predominantly Yoruba, specifically speakers of the Igbomina dialect. This research focused on examining the role of dialogue as a social factor influencing varying levels of marital conflict resolution among couples in the region. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, as it is well-suited for perception-based studies. The study also adopted a quantitative approach to effectively capture and analyze data related to the research questions. The target population comprised individuals who are currently married or have been previously married and reside in one of the five major towns: Omu-Aran, Oko-Irese, Oro, Oke-Oningbin, and Ajase-Ipo. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined criteria: (1) the individual must be married or formerly married, and (2) they must reside in one of the specified towns. Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire titled "Marital Conflict and Dialogue Resolution Questionnaire" (MCDRQ) with 15 items. The instrument was subjected to validation. Its reliability was established using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.84. A total sampling size of 400 respondents was selected using a structured questionnaire. 80 respondents were drawn from each of the 5 town. A total of 377 questionnaire forms were returned, but 364 were completed and deemed valid for analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as percentages, mean scores, rank order were used to address the research question, while the hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA. All at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: *Respondents Demographic Data*

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Religion		
African Traditional Religion	18	4.9

Christianity	131	36.0
Islam	215	59.1
Total	364	100.0
Length of Years in Marriage		
20 years and below	211	58.0%
21 years and above	153	42.0%
Total	364	100.0
Ethnicity		
Hausa	42	11.6
Igbo	69	18.9
Yoruba	253	69.5
Total	364	100.0

As presented in Table 1, based on religion, 18 (4.9%) of the respondents are of the African Traditional Religion, 131 (36%) of the respondents are Christians, while 215 (59.1%) of the respondents are Muslims. Based on length of years in marriage, 211 (58%) of the respondents have spent between 20 years and below in their marriages, while 153 (42%) of the respondents have spent between 21 years and above in their marriages. Based on ethnicity, 42 (11.6%) of the respondents are from the Hausa ethnic group, 69 (18.9%) of the respondents are from the Igbo ethnic group, while 253 (69.5%) of the respondents are from the Yoruba ethnic group. This thus indicates that majority of the respondents are Muslims, have spent between 20 years and below in their marriages and are from the Yoruba ethnic group.

Research Question One: What is the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 2: *Response on the Role of Dialogue in Resolving Marital Conflicts among Couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria*

Item No	Statement of Items	Mean	SD	Rank

4	Dialogue helps couples express their concerns clearly during conflict.	3.32	0.89	1st
6	Through dialogue, couples are able to avoid misunderstandings when resolving issues.	3.30	0.91	2nd
9	Engaging in dialogue helps couples communicate without anger or aggression.	3.29	0.93	3rd
11	Dialogue allows couples to feel heard and respected.	3.26	0.95	4th
14	Structured dialogue helps couples prevent escalation of minor disagreements.	3.21	0.97	5th
3	When couples use dialogue, they resolve differences more quickly.	3.20	0.99	6th
1	Dialogue helps couples focus on solutions instead of blaming each other.	3.19	1.01	7th
5	Constructive dialogue enables couples to compromise more easily.	3.18	1.02	8th
12	When couples talk through issues, the likelihood of repeating the same conflict is reduced.	3.13	1.04	9th
15	Dialogue contributes to lasting resolutions to marital disputes.	3.10	1.06	10th
2	Dialogue taught by the counsellor improves how couples resolve conflicts.	3.07	1.08	11th
7	Seeking professional help for dialogue has helped couples avoid separation.	2.84	1.12	12th
10	Dialogue has strengthened the trust in my marital relationship.	2.61	1.15	13th
13	Consistent use of dialogue has improved couples' marital satisfaction.	2.54	1.17	14th
8	I believe dialogue is essential to sustaining a stable marriage	2.48	1.19	15th

Table 2 indicates the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria. Ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd with mean scores of 3.32, 3.30 and 3.29 are Items 4, 6 and 9. These Items states that "Dialogue helps couples express their concerns clearly during conflict; Through dialogue, couples are able to avoid misunderstandings when resolving issues; and Engaging in dialogue helps couples communicate without anger or aggression". Ranked 15th with a mean score of 2.48 is Item 8 which states that "I believe dialogue is essential to sustaining a stable marriage". Since fourteen out of the fifteen items have mean scores that is above the mid mean score of 2.50, then it can be said that the

respondents attested to the generated items and that the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria is high.

Hypotheses Testing

Three null hypotheses were generated and as well tested for this study. The hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA statistical methods at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria based on religion

Table 3: *Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Showing the Role of Dialogue in Resolving Marital Conflicts among Couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria Based on Religion*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	577.891	2	288.94	1.92	3.00	0.10
Within Groups	54069.550	361	149.77			
Total	54647.441	363				

Table 3 shows that the calculated f-ratio of 1.92, a critical f- ratio of 3.00 and a p-value of 0.10. Since the calculated p-value of 0.10 is greater than the alpha p-value at 0.05, the hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria based on religion based on religion.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria based on length of years in marriage

Table 4: **The** *t-test showing the Role of Dialogue in Resolving Marital Conflicts among Couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria Based on Length of Years in Marriage*

Length of Years in Marriage	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
20 years and below	211	38.12	8.65	362	1.02	1.96	0.08
21 years and above	153	37.46	6.43				

Table 4 shows a calculated t-value of 1.02, a critical t-value of 1.96 and a p-value of 0.08. The p-value calculated is higher than the alpha level at 0.05 then the hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among

couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria based on religion based on length of years in marriage.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital

conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria based on ethnicity

Table 5: *Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Showing Role of Dialogue in Resolving Marital Conflicts among Couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria Based on Ethnicity*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	603.442	2	301.72	2.01	3.00	0.07
Within Groups	54043.999	361	149.70			
Total	54647.441	363				

Table 5 shows that the calculated f-ratio of 2.01, a critical f- ratio of 3.00 and a p-value of 0.07. Since the calculated p-value of 0.07 is greater than the alpha p-value at 0.05, the hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A, Kwara State, Nigeria based on religion based on ethnicity.

Discussion of the Findings

The finding that the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A is high aligns with a growing body of empirical evidence. Adegboyega (2021) found that effective spousal communication reduces misunderstandings and promotes conflict resolution among couples in Ilorin, Kwara State. Onyekuru (2022) also reported that communication strategies are positively associated with marital satisfaction among couples in Southeast Nigeria. Similarly, Awosan, Iroye, and Okolo (2023) concluded that dialogue fosters cooperation and emotional bonding in Nigerian marriages. These findings suggest that dialogue serves not only as a method for managing conflict but also as a foundation for nurturing mutual respect and understanding between partners. The consistency of these findings across different contexts underscores dialogue as a universally effective tool in marital conflict resolution, and validates its significance in the cultural setting of Irepodun L.G.A, where traditional values often emphasize reconciliation and communal harmony.

The finding that there is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in Irepodun L.G.A based on religion suggests that dialogue is a universally applicable tool for marital conflict resolution, regardless of religious affiliation. This aligns with the findings of Elom, Ilo, and Ojide (2023) who noted that the effectiveness of spousal communication in reducing marital conflict was not influenced by religious background but rather

by the quality of interaction and willingness to engage in open dialogue. In addition, Elegbede et al. (2024) emphasized that religious values often support the use of peaceful dialogue and reconciliation in marriage, but the specific religion practiced did not significantly alter how

dialogue contributed to resolving disputes. This finding reinforces the idea that effective communication, rather than religious identity, is the critical factor in addressing marital tensions. Therefore, dialogue remains a culturally and religiously neutral strategy that can be adopted by counsellors and religious leaders across all faiths to promote marital harmony and reduce the risk of conflict escalation.

The finding that there is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts based on length of years in marriage suggests that dialogue remains a consistently effective conflict resolution tool across all stages of marital life, whether newly married or long-term couples. This supports the study by Adeoye and Okonkwo (2020), who found that couples of varying marital durations benefited equally from structured communication practices in resolving conflicts. Similarly, Olorunfemi and Ajayi (2021) reported that the effectiveness of dialogue in marital relationships is not dependent on how long the couple has been together, but rather on their willingness to engage in open and respectful communication. Eze and Nwankwo (2019) observed that long-married couples who practice dialogue continue to report higher satisfaction and fewer recurring conflicts, much like newlyweds who apply similar communication strategies. The uniform effectiveness of dialogue across different marriage durations suggests that counselling interventions should not be limited to early marriage phases. Rather, dialogue-based approaches should be continuously reinforced throughout the marital journey, as the need for mutual understanding and conflict resolution persists regardless of the number of years spent in the union.

The finding that there is no significant difference in the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts based on ethnicity indicates that dialogue is a universally effective strategy for conflict resolution across ethnic groups in Irepodun L.G.A. This suggests that the principles of respectful listening, mutual understanding, and open communication transcend cultural and ethnic boundaries when it comes to addressing marital disputes. This aligns with the findings of Ibrahim and Lawal (2020), who noted that despite cultural variations, the effectiveness of dialogue in marital conflict resolution remained constant among Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo couples in a cross-regional study. Similarly, Okafor and Obasi (2018) found that dialogue was positively correlated with marital harmony among ethnically diverse couples in southeastern Nigeria. Therefore, this finding underscores the importance of promoting dialogue-focused interventions in multicultural communities like Irepodun L.G.A, where diverse ethnic groups coexist, and shared values of communication can foster stronger marital bonds.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts among couples in

Irepodun Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that dialogue plays a crucial and highly effective role in promoting mutual understanding, de-escalating tension, and fostering emotional reconciliation among married partners. Dialogue, especially when

practiced through active listening, structured expression, and mutual respect, enables couples to address not only the surface-level issues of conflict but also the deeper emotional and psychological needs that often underlie disagreements. The study also found no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of dialogue in conflict resolution based on religion, length of years in marriage, or ethnicity. This suggests that dialogue as a conflict resolution strategy is universally valuable and culturally adaptable across diverse marital contexts in Irepodun L.G.A. Regardless of background or belief system, couples who embrace dialogue are better equipped to manage conflict in a constructive and emotionally safe manner.

Recommendations

1. Marriage counsellors, religious leaders, and family life educators should intensify efforts to integrate structured dialogue techniques, such as active listening, emotional validation, and constructive expression, into marital counselling programs and community workshops.
2. Given that dialogue transcends religious differences, all the religious organizations in the area should collaborate to promote inter-faith marital counselling approaches that will incorporate dialogue as a central conflict resolution tool.
3. Marriage enrichment programs should be made accessible to both newlyweds and long-married couples alike, as all marital stages can benefit from dialogue-based conflict resolution.
4. Since dialogue is effective across different ethnic groups, the Government and non-governmental organisations should design multilingual and culturally sensitive counselling materials that promote dialogue and are easily accessible to the diverse ethnic populations.

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Abstract

This study investigated the roles of counselling in managing marital conflicts among young couples in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. With rising cases of marital instability, especially among newlyweds, the research sought to understand how professional counselling interventions address conflicts related to gender roles, religious background differences, level of education and temperamental traits. The study employed a descriptive survey research design, involving a sample of 380 young couples (married between 1 and 5 years) selected through multistage sampling from selected couples within Kodakpe district of Karu Local Government. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Roles of Counselling in Marital Conflict Questionnaire (RCMCQ). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (independent t-test) were employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that counselling significantly contributes to conflict resolution across the examined dimensions, with respondents who received counselling showing higher levels of conflict management and marital stability than those who did not. Specifically, counselling enhanced understanding of gender roles, improved adaptation to religious background's differences, strengthened mutual respect despite differences in levels of education and promoted healthy temperamental crisis management. The study concludes that counselling plays a vital preventive and curative role in stabilizing young marriages. It recommends the institutionalization of premarital and marital counselling within religious and community structures, increased public awareness, and integration of family life education in the society. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of how counselling can foster sustainable family systems in Nigeria.

Keywords: Marital conflict, counselling, young couples, gender roles, religious background differences, level of education, temperamental compatibility, Karu L.G.A.

Introduction

Marriage is a widely accepted social and legal union between an adult man and an adult woman. It is seen as a basic building block of human society. It's more than a ceremonial contract;

it's a close, lifelong partnership based on love, trust, shared values, and a commitment to each other. Religious and cultural teachings both say that marriage should be stable, peaceful, and fulfilling (Adeyeye, 2021). But the truth is that many young couples today are in a different

situation. A lot of people spend time and money getting ready for the wedding day, but not as many people spend time and money getting ready for the marriage itself. Because of this, many marriages start to have problems not long after they start.

Young couples often come from different religious, educational, and emotional backgrounds, which means they have different personalities, ways of looking at the world, and personal goals. Couples who grew up in the same way can still have problems. Differences in personality, family values, how people talk to each other, or what people expect from their gender can all lead to misunderstandings. If these differences aren't recognized and handled correctly, they can cause problems in a marriage or even end it (Okafor & Osakinle, 2020). A lot of young couples think that love is all they need to keep their marriage going. But when their expectations aren't met and the pressure builds, they start to doubt their choices, which makes them angry and emotionally distant.

Conflict in marriage isn't always bad; in fact, it's a normal part of any close relationship. It becomes a problem when it isn't handled well or isn't resolved. There are many things that can cause problems in a marriage, such as gender roles, family history, mental differences, emotional instability, or differences in temperament (Adeyeye, 2021). For instance, a partner who grew up in a strict home might have trouble agreeing with someone who grew up in a more liberal one. Differences in intelligence, emotional maturity, or behavior, like being an introvert or an extrovert, can make things even harder for couples. If these problems are not dealt with or ignored, they could lead to constant fights, emotional distance, or even divorce.

Professional counseling is a crucial step in overcoming these obstacles. Couples can communicate their worries, understand one another, and create productive conflict resolution techniques in a safe, controlled environment that counselling offers. Counsellors guide couples toward understanding and cooperation by assisting them in identifying their unique strengths and differences. A stable marriage also requires interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, and reasonable expectations, all of which are promoted by professional counselling (Igbokwe, Ezegbe, & Nwosu, 2022). However, because of cultural stigmas or a lack of access to qualified professionals, many couples still find it difficult to seek counselling.

These concerns are especially pertinent in the Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, which is home to an increasing number of young, urbanizing couples. Marital relationships are frequently strained by the blending of traditional expectations and contemporary values. In order to better understand how counselling can help young couples in Karu L.G.A. resolve marital conflict, this study will examine how factors like gender differences, background disparities, and mental and temperamental differences affect marital harmony or discord.

Several literary traditions emphasize the intricacy of marriage and the difficulties couples

frequently encounter in order to put the problem of marital conflict and the function of counseling in perspective. It is commonly acknowledged that marital conflict is a typical aspect of close relationships and that it results from differences in personal expectations from both genders,

differences in religious background, different levels of education and temperamental compatibility (Fincham & Beach, 2010). The stresses of modern life, unstable economies, and conflicting traditional and modern gender roles make marriages more difficult for young couples, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria (Oluwafemi & Abiodun, 2019).

Individual differences like gender roles, temperamental differences, educational and religious upbringing, emotional maturity, and intellectual capacity, have been shown to have a significant impact on how marital conflicts arise and are resolved (Adeyeye, 2021). Unrealistic expectations and differing degrees of readiness are common when couples first get married, which can cause disappointment and a lot of differences and compatibility (Nwankwo & Nwoke, 2018). Due to social stigma, limited access to professional counselling, or an excessive reliance on unofficial sources of guidance like family elders and religious leaders, these issues are frequently not sufficiently addressed (Eyo, Joshua, & Esuong, 2020).

It has been demonstrated that counselling is essential for assisting couples in improving their ability to communicate, cultivate empathy, and settle disputes amicably. It offers a secure environment where underlying problems can be investigated and handled with expert assistance (Igbokwe, Ezegbe, & Nwosu, 2022). However, little is known about the prevalence of counselling and its effects, particularly for young couples in semi-urban Nigerian communities like Karu L.G.A. By examining how counselling interventions specifically help address conflicts related to gender roles, religious background, level of each spouse's education, and temperamental compatibility in young marriages.

Statement of the Problem

Marital conflict has become a major problem in Nigerian society today, especially for young couples. These days, a lot of marriages are marked by emotional strain, frequent misunderstandings, and, in the worst situations, separation or divorce. These difficulties are frequently caused by disparities in temperament, upbringing, gender norms, and levels of education or intellectual development. Nevertheless, these distinctions are usually disregarded in the early phases of a relationship, and couples frequently marry before fully comprehending the consequences of these differences (Eyo, Joshua, & Esuong, 2020).

The situation is consistent with national trends in Nasarawa State's expanding urban community, Karu Local Government Area. In their married lives, couples from diverse religious and educational backgrounds frequently have to adjust to new realities. Unfortunately, a lot of these couples don't have the resources or direction to deal with the inevitable arguments that come up. Professional counselling is still not widely used as a dependable and organized method of resolving marital conflicts, even though some people may seek support from religious or community leaders.

Couples frequently feel overburdened in the absence of early intervention and expert advice, which can result in emotional detachment, animosity, or relationship disintegration. There is little empirical information on how counselling is used, viewed, and valued by young couples in Karu

L.G.A., despite the fact that counselling services are becoming more widely known in other parts of Nigeria. By investigating the function of counselling in resolving marital disputes involving gender-roles differences, religious background, differences in level of education and temperamental compatibility, this study aims to close that gap.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the roles of counselling in resolving marital conflict among young couples in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Investigate the role of counselling in managing gender-related marital conflicts.
2. Examine how counselling addresses conflicts arising from differences in religious background.
3. Ascertain the effectiveness of counselling in resolving conflicts stemming from educational differences between partners.
4. Explore the role of counselling in mitigating conflicts linked to temperamental and emotional differences.

Research Hypotheses

To answer the research questions statistically, the following null hypotheses were tested:

i. **H_0:** There is no significant role of counselling on gender-related conflicts among young couples in Karu L.G.A.
ii. **H_0:** There is no significant role of counselling on religion background-related conflicts among young couples in Karu L.G.A.
iii. **H_0:** There is no significant role of counselling on level of education differences-related conflicts among young couples in Karu L.G.A.
iv. **H_0:** There is no significant role of counselling on temperamental-related conflicts among young couples in Karu L.G.A.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the role of counselling in addressing marital conflict among young couples in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. The target population consisted of couples who had been married between 1 to 5 years, with a sample size of 380 respondents selected through a multistage sampling technique from selected churches in Kodakpe district of Karu LGA. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire titled Roles of Counselling in Marital Conflict Questionnaire (RCMCQ), which was

divided into sections addressing key variables such as gender, religious background, levels of education and temperamental differences. The instrument's content validity was reviewed by three experts from the Department of Guidance and Counselling at Bingham University. The logical

validity index after the experts' review was 0.81. The pilot study result was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha method of determining the reliability of internal consistency which gave a score of 0.79. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to analyze demographic data, while independent sample t-tests were applied to test the null hypotheses using SPSS. The t-test was chosen for its appropriateness in comparing mean differences between groups and assessing the significance of counselling in resolving various marital conflicts.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The information gathered from 380 young couples in Nasarawa State's Karu Local Government Area using the Roles of Counselling in Marital Conflict Questionnaire (RCMCQ) is presented in this section. According to the study's previously stated research questions and hypotheses, the data was gathered with precision to support answers and present equity, and both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the analysis. A 4-point Likert scale (SA = 4, A = 3, D = 2, SD = 1) was used. The mean and standard deviation were used to analyze each section of the RCMCQ.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: *The demographic data of respondents were analyzed using frequency counts and*

percentages.

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)	Percentage %
Gender	Male	190	50.0%
	Female	190	50.0%
	Total	**380**	**100%**
Level of Education	Secondary	50	13.2%
	NCE/OND	90	23.7%
	HND/Bachelor	170	44.7%
	Postgraduate	70	18.4%
	Total	**380**	**100%**
Occupation	Civil Servant	130	34.2%
	Teacher	70	18.4%
	Business Owner	100	26.3%
	Artisan	80	21.1%
	Total	**380**	**100%**
Background (Religion)	Christianity	290	76.3%
	Islam	60	15.8%
	Traditional	30	7.9%
	Total	**380**	**100%**
Counselling Attended	None	60	15.8%
	Marital only	80	21.1%
	Both	100	26.3%
	Total	**380**	**100%**
Temperamental Conflict Experience	Yes	300	78.9%
	No	80	21.1%
	Total	**380**	**100%**

The distribution of the 380 young couples who took part in the study in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State is shown in the demographic data in the table above. With 190 respondents each (50.0%), the gender distribution demonstrates an equal representation of men and women. The majority of respondents (44.7%) had an HND or bachelor's degree, followed by NCE/OND (23.7%), postgraduate degrees (18.4%), and secondary school completion (13.2%). Those who worked, 34.2% were civil servants, 26.3% were entrepreneurs, 21.1% were craftspeople, and 18.4% were educators. Christian respondents were made up of 76.3% of the participants, followed by Muslims (15.8%) and traditionalists (7.9%). According to the table, 15.8% had no counselling experience, 21.1% had only marital counseling, 26.3% had both pre-marital and marital counseling, and 36.8% had pre-marital counseling. Interestingly, a sizable percentage of respondents (78.9%) stated that they had dealt with temperamental related marital conflict, while only 21.1% had no conflict.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics on Counselling and Gender-Related Conflict*

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Status
Q1	Understanding gender differences helps settle conflict	3.15	0.89	Agree
Q2	Counselling improved gender appreciation	3.19	0.88	Agree
Q3	Difficulty accepting spouse's gender influence	2.13	1.01	Disagree
Q4	Marital counselling improved gender role understanding	3.21	0.87	Agree
Q5	Counselling led to respect for gender differences	3.17	0.84	Agree

Interpretation: According to the descriptive statistics in Table 2, majority of respondents believed that counselling is helpful in resolving gender-related marital conflicts. The respondents, whose mean scores ranged from 3.15 to 3.21, concurred that their appreciation and comprehension of their spouse's gender roles were greatly enhanced by counselling support (Q2), marital counseling (Q4), and understanding gender differences (Q1). Additionally, they concurred that counselling encouraged tolerance for these distinctions (Q5, M = 3.17). It's interesting to note that item Q3, which asks about how difficult it is to accept a spouse's gender influence in decision-making, had a higher standard deviation (SD = 1.01) and a lower mean (2.13), suggesting that most respondents disagreed with the statement, albeit with more variation in their answers. Overall, the evidence points to the benefits of counselling for raising gender awareness and lowering gender-related disputes in young couples.

Table 3: *Descriptive Statistics on Counselling and Religious Background-Related Conflict*

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Status
Q6	Counselling helped adjust to spouse's religious background	3.16	0.85	Agree
Q7	Religious background incompatibility causes conflict	2.22	0.95	Disagree
Q8	Counselling supports background-related adjustments	3.24	0.82	Agree
Q9	Premarital counselling prepared us for religious differences	3.15	0.91	Agree
Q10	Counselling helps manage religious differences	3.17	0.84	Agree

Interpretation: Descriptive statistics on respondents' opinions of counselling in handling marital disputes relating to religious background are shown in Table 4.3. According to the findings, most respondents agreed that counseling has been helpful in assisting them in adjusting to their spouse's religious background (Q6, M = 3.16), supporting these adjustments (Q8, M = 3.24), and assisting in overcoming difficulties arising from religious differences (Q10, M = 3.17). Additionally, they

confirmed that premarital counseling helped them prepare for religious background differences in

marriage (Q9, M = 3.15). Notably, item Q7, which asserts that background incompatibility inevitably leads to conflict, had a mean score of 2.22, indicating that respondents disagreed and that, with appropriate management, religious differences might not always lead to conflict. Overall, the results highlight how counseling lowers the risk of conflict by assisting couples in navigating and adjusting to their varied religious background.

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics on Counselling and couple's level of education*

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Status
Q11	Counselling handled level of education differences	3.13	0.89	Agree
Q12	Counselling helped manage differences in level of edu	3.26	0.78	Strongly Agree
Q13	Counselling boosted self-esteem	3.10	0.92	Agree
Q14	Educational differences can cause marital conflict	3.26	0.79	Strongly Agree
Q15	Equal level of education not required for marriage success	3.21	0.82	Agree

Interpretation: The information in Table 4 illustrates how respondents felt counselling affected the way different levels of education in marriage were handled. Most respondents concurred that counselling was essential for elucidating different levels of education (Q11, M = 3.13) and increasing relationship self-esteem (Q13, M = 3.10). They acknowledged that, if left unchecked, the differences could cause marital strife (Q14, M = 3.26), and they strongly agreed that counselling greatly aided in managing the effects of education differences (Q12, M = 3.26). Additionally, respondents agreed that a successful marriage does not require equal education level (Q15, M = 3.21), indicating a mature understanding that compatibility does not equate to sameness. Overall, the findings support the value of counselling in assisting couples in identifying, comprehending, and adjusting to educational and intellectual differences, which helps to lessen marital disputes pertaining to the level of education of couple.

Table 5: *Descriptive Statistics on Counselling and Temperamental Differences*

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Status
Q16	Counselling improved temperamental management	3.13	0.89	Agree
Q17	Counselling resolved temperament incompatibility	3.14	0.85	Agree
Q18	Introvert/extrovert can coexist with counselling	3.29	0.77	Strongly Agree
Q19	Opposite temperaments can complement each other	3.21	0.83	Agree
Q20	Counselling helps partners adjust to temperament	3.18	0.84	Agree

Interpretation: Respondents' opinions regarding the function of counselling in resolving

temperamental conflicts in marriage are shown in Table 5. The information indicates that there is broad consensus that counselling has greatly enhanced temperamental trait management (Q16, M = 3.13) and assisted in resolving temperamental incompatibilities (Q17, M = 3.14). Both respondents strongly agreed that opposite temperaments can complement one another when properly guided (Q19, M = 3.21) and that introverts and extroverts can coexist in marriage with appropriate counselling (Q18, M = 3.29). Furthermore, they confirmed that counselling helps partners with different emotional dispositions adjust and understand one another (Q20, M = 3.18). All of these results point to the effectiveness of counselling in improving young couples' emotional compatibility and lowering temperament-related disputes.

Test of Hypotheses

Four null hypotheses were proposed to examine whether counselling significantly influences different types of marital conflict among young couples in Karu L.G.A. Below is the **comprehensive table** presentation of t-test results and interpretations of all four hypotheses tested in the study on *The Roles of Counselling on Marital Conflict Among Young Couples in Karu L.G.A. of Nasarawa State*. The table includes the mean scores for couples who attended counselling and those who did not, the t-test values, degrees of freedom (df), p-values, and decisions made based on the 0.05 significance level.

Table 6: *Summary of Hypotheses Testing Using t-test Analysis (N = 380)*

Hypothesis	Variable	Group	Mean	SD	t(df)	p-value	Decision
H_{01}	Gender-related conflict	Attended Counselling	3.24	0.68	t(378) = 4.91	**0.000**	Reject H_{01}
		Did Not Attend	2.74	0.82			
H_{02}	Religious background-related conflict	Attended Counselling	3.18	0.72	t(378) = 3.59	**0.000**	Reject H_{02}
		Did Not Attend	2.80	0.79			
H_{03}	Levels of education related conflict	Attended Counselling	3.22	0.70	t(378) = 2.88	**0.004**	Reject H_{03}
		Did Not Attend	2.91	0.75			
H_{04}	Temperamental-related conflict	Attended Counselling	3.25	0.68	t(378) = 3.78	**0.000**	Reject H_{04}
		Did Not Attend	2.86	0.80			

Table 6 signifies that counseling has a statistically significant role in helping couples resolve marital conflicts relating to gender differences, religious background, different levels of education

and temperament, as evidenced by the rejection of all four null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of

significance.

Discussion

The results of the descriptive and inferential statistics provide compelling evidence for the crucial role that counselling plays in reducing marital disputes in young couples. Participants viewed counselling as a useful tool for enhancing marital stability, as evidenced by the high levels of agreement (Mean ≈ 3.2) across gender, religious background, different levels of education, and temperamental domains.

These results support the claims made by Adeyeye (2021), who noted that counselling is essential for resolving major marital conflicts like religious background differences, temperamental incompatibility, and poor communication. Furthermore, the data supports the assertion made by Aremu and Lawal (2020) that counselling enhances mutual understanding in relationships, fosters emotional intelligence, and facilitates conflict resolution.

Crucially, across all four domains, the t-test results showed statistically significant differences between couples who received counselling and those who did not. This is in line with the structural functionalist theory, which contends that when counselling services are used well, they promote social harmony and stability.

Summary of Findings

This study investigated how counselling can help young couples in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State especially in resolving marital disputes. Using a descriptive survey design, the study included 380 respondents who were young couples in their first five years of marriage. Four aspects of marital conflict were examined by using the Roles of Counselling in Marital Conflict Questionnaire (RCMCQ): temperamental incompatibility, differences in levels of education, religious background incompatibility, and gender roles differences.

With 78.9% of respondents admitting to having marital conflict in their homes, the demographic data analysis showed that it is a common problem. According to the descriptive analysis, premarital, marital, or both couples who had received counselling reported much higher levels of satisfaction with their capacity to resolve disputes. All conflict dimensions showed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between couples who received counselling and those who did not, according to inferential statistics (independent t-tests).

In particular, counselling was found to assist couples in recognizing and adjusting to differences in their level of education, managing cultural and religious background differences, understanding and respecting gender roles, and constructively navigating temperamental differences. These results confirmed that counselling plays a vital role in helping young couples develop comprehension, empathy, and problem-solving techniques, which eventually promotes marital stability and harmony.

Conclusion

Despite being a deep and rewarding institution, marriage is frequently hampered by a variety of interpersonal dynamics resulting from individual differences. According to the study's findings, counselling is essential for giving young couples the skills and knowledge they need to deal with these difficulties. The results showed that counselling promotes different gender self-awareness, respect for one another's roles, handling religious, temperamental and level of education differences, all of which are critical components of a happy marriage.

Thus, especially for young couples, incorporating counselling services into premarital and marital support networks can greatly lower the rate of marital dissolution. The assistance of qualified marriage counsellors can strengthen commitment, foster compatibility, and demystify irrational expectations. In summary, counselling is a proactive and preventive strategy for fostering long-lasting marriages rather than just a reactive one.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings:

1. Marriage counsellors should include self-awareness and appreciation of gender roles, understanding partner's religious background and education as well as handling temperamental compatibility in their counselling session.
2. Religious organizations and community leaders should mandate and continue premarital and marital counselling for young couples.
3. The government and non-governmental organizations ought to make investments in the education and employment of certified marriage counsellors in family welfare units.

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PRACTICE: CONCEPTS, STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Emotional status of the professional counsellors and clients are veritable tool for counselling outcomes. Emotions of the counsellor and clients are deeply involved in counselling session hence, they are vital components of counselling interaction and intervention. The display of the right type of emotions plays a significant and multifaceted role in the attainment of counselling objectives. Emotions drive counsellors and client's actions and inactions. High emotional intelligence of the counsellor has the tendency and capacity to facilitate positive counselling outcomes. Lack of competency in counselling practice has been associated with unacceptably low emotional intelligence. Therefore, understanding the interconnectivity between emotional intelligence and counselling practice is highly imperative in counselling relationship between counsellor and clients. Literature on emotional intelligence and counselling profession in this part of the world is very limited in number. Adequate information on issues associated with emotional intelligence and counselling will be needed in order to improve counselling service delivery in Africa. This paper, therefore, sheds light on the interconnectivity between emotional intelligence (EI) and counselling practice with particular reference to meaning of counselling and counsellor, personality traits of counsellors and discusses the concept of emotional intelligence, historical development of EI, components and levels of EI. The paper further examines importance of EI in counselling practice, counselling skills for EI and concludes with challenges and remedies associated with the employment of EI in counselling practice.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, emotional suppression, counselling, counsellor, client,

Introduction

Human beings by nature are emotional beings. Statharakos, Alvares, Papadopoulou and Anastasia Statharakou (2022) assert that emotions are an essential part of human existence. Consequently, emotional expression cannot be downplayed in human beings engagements. Similarly, relationship between counsellors and clients, by nature, is emotionally inclined. Goleman (1995); Bar-On and Parker (2000); Bernes (2003) submit that emotions play a pronounced role in life endeavours and could facilitate expected change in clients' behaviour. As a result of the complex role of emotions in counselling practice, Md Nor et al, (2024) say that counselling profession is often considered emotionally demanding for professional counsellors.

Emotion typically involves feeling, according to American Psychological Association (2018a) but

differs from feeling in that it has an overt or implicit engagement with the world.

The word emotion has its origin from the French word emouvoir and Latin word emovere which in English Language translation means to “stir up” and to “move out” respectively. American Psychological Association (2018a) defines emotion as “a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioural, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event”.

Salovey and Mayer (1990)defined “emotions as organized responses, crossing the boundaries of many psychological subsystems, including the physiological, cognitive, motivational, and experiential systems."Rossingol (2022) traced the very long history of emotions to genetically inherited emotional neural circuits that were developed throughout the lives of 50,000 human generations which still remain the same despite 10,000 years of rapid rise of civilization. Emotions, as rightly pointed out by Boyd (2022), were often dismissed as volatile, irrelevant, and irrational to clinical practice in the early development of modern Western psychology and medicine but in recent decades the advent of neuroscience now recognized emotions as fundamental to human experience and they play a central role in information processing, decision-making, and interaction with the world.

In counselling practice, emotions of both the counsellor are deeply involved. Emotion is not only the ‘silent’ driver of counselling relationship between the counsellor and the client but also influences the outcomes and effectiveness of counselling. The part of emotion in counselling practice makes it sometimes emotional demanding or sapping. The counsellor and the client will need to build strong and effective emotions for counselling objectives to be realized. Faisal et al., (2022) assert that in building effective emotions,emotional intelligence plays a crucial role. Emotional intelligence is revolutionizing professional counselling practice to meet emotional needs of clients.

Emotional intelligence is a valuable skill because practicing it fosters interpersonal contacts between conversational partners as well as upsurges self-awareness for the individual, which may lead to improved decision making (Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors, 2023). Conversational partners in the context of this paper are counsellors and their client. This paper, therefore, sheds light on the interconnectivity between emotional intelligence (EI) and counselling practice with particular reference to meaning of counselling and counsellor, personality traits of counsellors and discusses the concept of emotional intelligence, historical development of EI, components and levels of EI. The paper further examines importance of EI in counselling practice, counselling skills for EI and concludes with challenges and remedies associated with the employment of EI in counselling practice.

What is Counselling?

Counselling is therapeutic. The counsellors and clients have to be involved in interactive sessions to resolve issues confronting the latter. No wonder then that counselling is referred to as a form of 'talk therapy'. Counselling as a profession is more than talking. It has been established that defining the term "counselling" is difficult. Definitional difficulties associated with the term 'counselling' are not only from the perspectives of laymen but also among professionals in the field. Aldridge (2014) confirms this assertion when he posits that c*ounsellors themselves can find it difficult to say what counselling is, but find it easier to describe what they do.* In this same vein Sheppard (n.d):

"Those of us who work as professional counsellors are confident that we know what counselling is and when given an opportunity we are ready and eager to tell others what we do. However, when challenged to provide a crisp, comprehensive, and boundary-setting definition of counselling, we often falter".

Gesinde (2024) classified counselling definitions from various sources into two. Some dictionaries are generally-inclined because they provided meanings not only for counselling but other terms and concepts from other fields of study. On the other hand, there are Counselling-inclined or Specialized Dictionary of Counselling specifically arranged to give meanings to counselling terms only. For instance, 286 pages of the Dictionary of Counselling (2nd ed.) by Feltham and Dryden (2004) make available over one thousand concise definitions of diverse counselling terms.

Apart from these, there are professional definitions from scholars in the field of counselling and professional association definition of counselling.Finally, there is consensus definition of counselling. A unified definition of the term 'counselling' did not come into existence until March 2010 when American Counselling Association Conference took place in Pittsburgh (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014).. It was at this conference that 29 major counselling organizations endorsed a consensus definition of counselling to be:

"Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals"

Who is a Counsellor?

Brown (2011) affirms that Carl Rogers used the term 'counsellor' in the Journal of Consulting Psychology and this represents the first documented reference to a 'counsellor' as a professional adviser different from other professionals like lawyers, diplomats and royal aides. Counselling is a professional service delivery in which a counsellor empowers the client to achieve set goals in life. A counsellor, therefore, is a trained individual who specializes in counselling counselees. He/she is saddled with meeting the counselling needs of clients on an individual or group basis as the case may be. The trained counsellor in question has certain personality characteristics and skills some of which are briefly described below:

Personality Characteristics of a Counsellor

These personality characteristics are desirable traits that will make counselling relationships with clients result-oriented. Some of these tested qualities of a counsellor includeabove average intelligence, objectivity, sense of humour, emphatic understanding, congruent, non-judgmental attitude, sociable, flexible, tolerance Gesinde (2024) and emotional stability which is the ability to remain calm or even keel when faced with pressure or stress

The Concept of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI) otherwise known as Emotional Quotient (EQ) has generated an all-encompassing interest by laymen, scholars, professionals, entrepreneurs, etc. and it has received diverse definitions as evident from the following definitions:

1. We define emotional intelligence as the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).
2. Emotional Intelligence is a type of intelligence that involves the ability to process emotional information and use it in reasoning and other cognitive activities (American Psychological Association, 2018b).
3. EI is best described as a way of thinking that enables people to perceive their own emotions, understand the emotional states of others, and behave appropriately in response (Cherry, 2022).
4. EI, refers to the ability to recognise, understand, and manage emotions and influence emotional responses in oneself and others (Lang, 2024).
5. Emotional intelligence also reflects an ability to use intelligence, empathy, and emotions to enhance understanding of interpersonal dynamics (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008)

Symptoms of Emotional Intelligence

Emotionally intelligent persons according to Drigas and Papoutsi (2018) have the following features:

Emotionally intelligent persons have abilities to:

i. identify how they and others are feeling, ability to
ii. manage emotions in real time, accept change,
iii. let go of mistakes and forgive others,
iv. be aware of their emotional strengths and weaknesses, and
v. be curious about self and others.

On the other hand, the following are the manifest symptoms of low intelligence in a person:

♦ Negative behaviour toward people’s ideas or communication

- ♦ Difficulties in interpreting, understanding, and acting on emotions
- ♦ difficulties in expressing personal emotions and feel uncomfortable when other displays emotions
- ♦ Difficulties in feeling empathy and showing love for others
- ♦ Manifestation of low self-esteem and poor self-confidence

Brief Historical Development of Emotional Intelligence

Abraham Maslow was recognized as the first scholar to have used a concept (emotional strength) similar to the concept of emotional intelligence in 1950s. He was of the view that emotional strength could be built to control emotions.

The first appearance of the concept of emotional intelligence was in the doctoral thesis (A study of emotion: Developing emotional intelligence) of Wayne Payne in 1985. Payne clearly made it clear in the abstract of the thesis that "This dissertation introduces the concept of emotional intelligence". Prior to 1985, Leuner was credited to have published a journal article on emotional intelligence and emancipation in 1966. Keith Beasely was ascribed to have used the concept of emotional quotient in his article published in one of the British magazines (British Mensa) in 1987.

In 1990, Mayer and Salovey published a journal article titled emotional intelligence. The publication of a best-selling book: Emotional Intelligence in - Why it can matter more than IQ- by Daniel Goleman in1996 increased the popularity of the term emotional intelligence. Other books written by Goleman include:

Emotional Intelligence (1995)

The Emotionally Intelligent Workshop: How to Select For, Measure, and Improve Emotional Intelligence in Individuals, Groups, and Organizations (Carry Chermiss & Daniel Coleman

Working with Emotional Intelligence (2009)

The Brain and Emotional Intelligence: New Insights (2011)

What Makes a Leader (Harvard Business Review Classics) (2017)

The emotionally Intelligent Leader (2019)

Components of Emotional Intelligence

In order to measure emotional intelligence Daniel Goleman developed a model from where he identified what could be referred to as five pillars or components of emotional intelligence namely: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These components work together and can be learned to build trust, achieve goals, and fortify communication and interpersonal relations. A brief on each of the components is provided below:

Self-awareness: This is recognized to be the bedrock on which the model lies. In the context of emotional intelligence, self-awareness is the conscious knowledge of one's emotion in terms of its

strengths and weaknesses and its influence on other people. The conscious knowledge of one's emotion will also include identification of emotional triggers and influence of one's emotion on behaviour or performance.

Self-regulation: This is the act of regulating one's emotion. It involves management of emotion through self-regulatory procedures without external intervention. It also focuses on the redirection of negative or disruptive emotions.

Motivation: This is all about directing one's emotion towards profitable goals. It also encompasses a desire to drive emotions in pursuit of personal values. The component of motivation is driven by intrinsic factors rather than extrinsic factors. One is intrinsically motivated to set healthy and measurable goals and attain such goals without external support, approval or reward.

Empathy: Unlike self-awareness empathy involves understanding and relating with other people emotions. It is all about putting oneself in the emotional shoes of others with a view to sharing in their feelings, perspectives and build deeper emotional connections. It is assumed that if you are in their shoes you will be in a better position to explain reasons for their actions and inactions.

Figure 1 below establishes the interrelationship among the pillars of emotional intelligence:

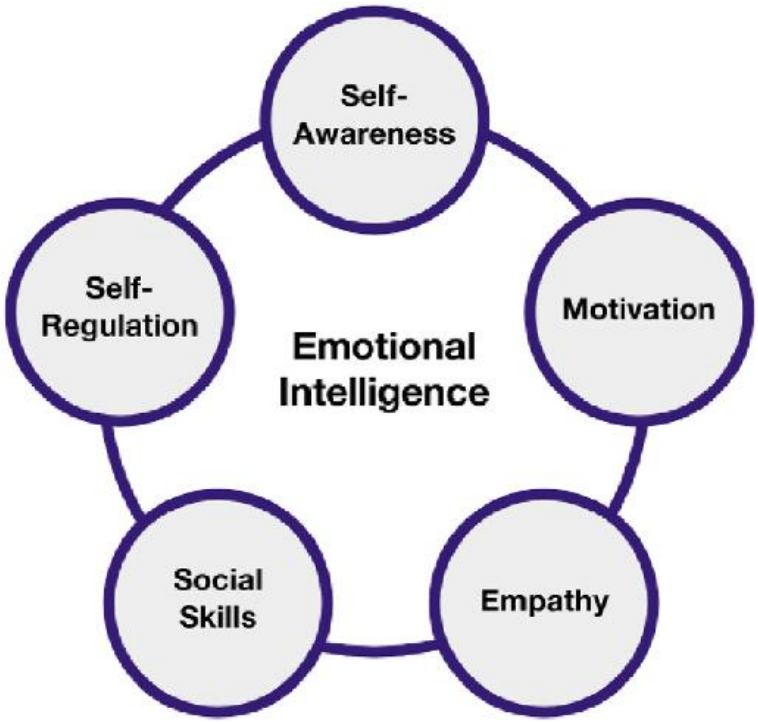

Figure 1: Concept of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995).

In 2000, Goleman expanded the four components of emotional intelligence further grouped

them into four domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship

management as depicted in Figure 2 below:

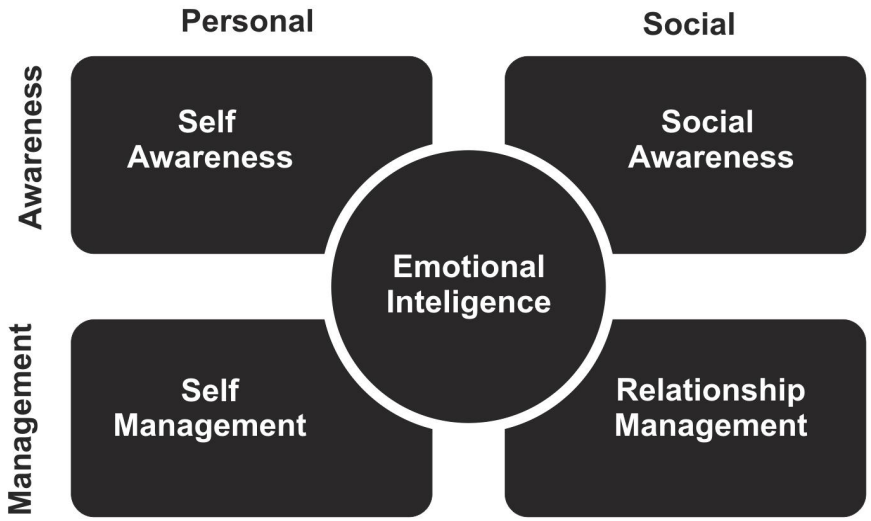

Figure 2: Expansion of 4 components of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000)

These components are further grouped into four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

Levels of Emotional Intelligence

Salovey and Mayer (1990) listed four levels or steps of emotional intelligence development. It starts with emotional perception and ends with emotional management as explain below:

Perceiving Emotions: This is the first step which focuses on the acknowledgement of the fact that emotional responses are real and could be measure accurately. It involves recognizing or/discerning and interpreting emotions from self and others. It is expected that this will cover nonverbal behaviours or cues such as facial expressions, body language, and vocalics.

Reasoning with emotions: This is the second step which primary focus is using emotion to enhance thinking or cognitive processes. In other words, emotional experience is used to promote cognitive engagements, think out solution to problems or make decision.

Understanding emotions: This is the third step where it is expected that meaning is ascribed to every emotional state. This is imperative because similar emotional expressions may convey a wide diversity of meanings or interpretations. Complex emotions must be comprehended with their underlying causes, long and short terms implications.

Managing emotions: This is the final step and it involves the effective regulation of one's emotion and those of others. The adoption of skills learned in steps one to three will be necessary in this last step. Emotional self-control skills, problem-solving skills, and conflict resolution strategies are additional skills for managing one's emotions and that of others in this final lap.

Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Professional Counselling Practice

The following authors have identified specific areas where emotional intelligence importance in counselling cannot be underestimated:

1. Emotional intelligence is the clincher for effective counselling determining how therapists interact with clients and shaping the treatment process (Saxena, 2021).
2. Emotional intelligence guide counsellors' emotional responses, strengthens counsellors' capability to relate with clients, and facilitate real change ((Hilts, Liu and Luke, 2022).
3. High degree of emotion makes a counsellor to be attuned to clients' unconscious emotional changes which will enable the counsellor to be non-judgmental (Saxema, 2021).
4. Emotional intelligence enables a counsellor to manage emotion in a way that their emotions, biases, and reactions do not interfere with the therapeutic processes (Paulraj, Alaboudi, Mali, Alawad, Alqahtani, Vetrayan, 2021).

Counselling Skills for Emotional Intelligence

The personality traits of the counsellor only could not be adequate enough to bring about a positive revolution in the behaviour of the client. Accordingly, the counsellor is expected to exhibit several counselling skills in addition to the personality features underscored above.

1) Attending Behaviour. Attending behavior is the act of providing unbroken attention to the client. It has been recognized to be the first basic counselling skill. Ivey, Packard, and Ivey (2018) see basic attending skills as the foundation of emphatic relationships and problem-solving. Attending behaviour will not only validate the fact that counsellors are listening but will also encourage the client to talk more freely (Ivey, Packard & Ivey, 2018). The "Three V's" and "B" through which attending behaviour can be realized, according to Ivey and Ivey (2003), are Visual/eye connection, Vocal Qualities, Verbal Tracking and Body Language. Gestures and facial expressions could also be used to create emphatic relationships with the client.
2) Active Listening: Active listening is an ultimate expectation in a multiplicity of disciplines such as counselling, psychiatry, psychology, and other forms of health care (Ricks & Brannon, 2023). Four diverse contexts of listening within the counselling sessions have been identified by Nelson-Jones (2014). These are counsellor listens to the therapist, client listens to the counsellor, counsellor listens to themselves, and client listens to themselves. To be active is to be energetically involved in something. Active listening in counselling context is not an ordinary listening exercise but sensitive listening. It is the intense efforts of the counsellor to pay close attention to client's verbal and nonverbal communication. Nelson-Jones (2014) sees active listening as something that is more than hearing someone's words but full attunement to views and feelings of the speaker. American Psychological Association (2018) identifies active listening as psychotherapeutic technique that will

enable therapist listens to a client closely and generate questions for the client so as to have full understanding of the message content and the deepness of the client's emotion. Several intentional actions must be carried out if a counsellor is to demonstrate the skill of active listening for the purpose of emotional intelligence development. These, according to Rogers and Farson (1987) will include listening for total message, responding to feelings and noting all cues.

i) **Listen for Total Meaning:** The counsellor will need to understand the total meaning of the message. Message from the client has two components of the content of the message and the feeling or attitude underlying the content. These two components make the message meaningful.

ii) **Respond to Feelings:** The counsellor will need to act on both the content and feeling of the message but it has been observed that in some cases the content is far less significant than the feeling. If the full flavour of a message is to be fully understood feeling component must be adequately responded to.

iii) **Note All Cues.** The counsellor will need to understand the fact that means of communication is not only limited to verbal communication. There is nonverbal cue of communication which can be revealed via: the way in which a speaker hesitates in his speech or stress certain points loudly and clearly, inflection of voice (changes in pitch and tone), mumbling of words (speaking quietly and unclearly),

— facial expressions,

— body posture,

— hand movements,

— eye movements, and

— breathing.

From the above it is clear that active listening is more than listening to speaker's words but a psychotherapeutic technique designed to pave way for proper diagnosis of psychological or emotional problems. It will also be helpful to know that certain behaviours or actions are not active listening. Miller and Rollnick (2013) listed such actions to include analyzing, blaming, commanding, distracting and humoring. Others are judging, lecturing, probing, shaming, and warning.

3) **Reflection of Feelings:** This is otherwise known as reflection response. The counsellor repeats or rephrases the client's last declaration and stresses the state of feeling (affective). Feelings in emotional tones are sometimes implicitly communicated by clients. It is the professional responsibility of the counsellor to isolate them for illumination through the reflection of feelings. When appropriately used, it will label the emotion (feeling) that is embedded in clients' communication. Kypridemos (2014) asserts that reflection of feeling is

advantageous in counselling because:

a) It can upsurge the counsellor's understanding of the clients.
b) It can help clients clarify their thoughts.
c) It can reassure clients that the counsellor is willing to help.

The Therapeutic Approach to Boosting Emotional Intelligence

Journaling Therapy

Journaling therapy also known as writing therapy is a form therapy in which the client is expected to purposefully expresses his/her internal frame of reference in writing articulating emotions, feelings, thoughts, and perceptions. Sohal, Singh, Dhillon, and Gill (2022) identified two major forms of journaling therapy. These are expressive writing and gratitude journaling.

The expressive writing exercise will give room for emotional self-examination that will further create self-awareness and emotional clarity. Self-awareness of one's emotions will generate empathy for others. Self-awareness and empathy are critical components of emotional intelligence. Pennebaker (1997) declares that expressive writing tend to improve mental and physical health. He developed an expressive writing protocol that will enable people provide information in writing their traumatic experience for over four days consecutively for 15-20minutes per session.

Role-playing

Psychologically, role playing is a therapeutic method where clients are expected to act out or behaviourally rehearse certain scenarios. This will enable them understand their emotional state and that of others. It will also increase self-awareness and enable them develop empathy which are basic ingredients for emotional intelligence.

Challenges Associated with Emotional Intelligence in Counselling Practice

1. Counsellors' Training and the Development of Emotional Intelligence in Nigeria

Professional training is critical in counselling practice. Would-be-counsellors are to obtain a minimum of first degree in any recognized universities in Nigeria in guidance and counselling/ counselling psychology before formal practice. In some cases, higher degrees may be required. Development of high level of emotional intelligence is a must for result-oriented counselling practice. Consequently, the curricular of the training programme for counselling degree ought to include elaborate study and practice in emotional intelligence. From what is obtainable from the CCMAS for guidance and counselling programme one may find it difficult to pinpoint to any elaborate study or practicum on the development of high level emotional intelligence.

This challenge of elaborate training on emotional intelligence his not limited to Nigeria, in Australia TrainSmart (2024) reports that traditional academic curricula for counselling sessions focus more on theoretical knowledge and technical skills and excluded emotional intelligence

skills. Some may want to argue that the more you practice as a counsellor the more you develop high emotional intelligence. Yes, it is possible but a well packaged training programme on emotional intelligence in school will be preferable than waiting for learning on the job. As rightly observed by Sirega (2025) attainment of emotional intelligence is not easy and does not appear suddenly an individual will need to be trained for it at an early age. Lang (2024) equally posits that counselling curriculum should incorporate emotional intelligence dedicated courses and modules with particular focus on theoretical foundations and emotional intelligence applications in therapeutic settings.

2. Emotional Suppression

Suppression of emotion is one other challenge associated with employment of emotional intelligence in counselling practice. Emotional intelligence and suppression have intertwine relationship. Emotional suppression or inhibition is the act of consciously preventing outward expression of emotions. Chapman et al. (2013) describe it as the intentional holding back of authentic emotional experiences and expression. Elsig (2022) says it happens when uncomfortable thoughts and feelings are pushed out of mind. Pain, fear, contempt, anger, unhappiness, disappointment, disgust, frustration, etc. are examples of emotions that could be suppressed. Husain (2022) affirms that emotional inhibition reduces emotional experience and harmful for mental health. Emotional suppression is dangerous to the development of emotional intelligence because it will present fake or shadow emotions from either the clients or the counsellor. Shadow emotions will not give room for appropriate self-awareness that kick-start the transition to high emotional intelligence. The challenge of suppressing emotions is typically common among men in Africa. Men, are traditionally trained and expected hold in their negative emotions from public glare. Menachem (2025) confirmed this assertion when he observed that: early in life many boys receive information not to welcome certain emotions such don't cry, man up or be strong. According to him such words appear to be harmless but with time they form foundation of emotional suppression which is affecting countless men globally.

It, therefore, behoves on counsellors to employ emotion-focused therapy techniques that will lead to the manifestation of real and not shadow emotions of clients.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence skills are highly indispensable in therapeutic process for both the counsellors and clients. Counsellors in particular will need it for effective counselling outcomes. Professional counsellors that cannot manage his/her emotions before and during therapy will not be able to demonstrate necessary emphatic understanding that will meet the emotional needs of the client.

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Abstract

Community-Based Dispute Resolution (CBDR) mechanisms have long played a vital role in resolving conflicts at the grassroots level, particularly in contexts where formal justice systems are either inaccessible, inefficient, or culturally misaligned. The study uses qualitative design using secondary data as review in the paper. However, despite their cultural relevance and accessibility, CBDR processes often overlook the emotional and psychological dimensions that underpin many interpersonal and communal conflicts. Unaddressed trauma, grief, and mistrust can persist even after formal agreements are reached, undermining the long-term effectiveness of such resolutions. This theoretical paper argues for a more holistic approach to CBDR by integrating counselling practices grounded in conflict transformation theory and psychosocial support frameworks. Counselling-informed methods can help uncover underlying relational wounds, facilitate emotional expression, and promote individual and collective healing. Such integration does not replace traditional practices but rather complements them, enriching the resolution process by acknowledging and working through the psychological scars that fuel

ongoing tensions. The paper suggested that CBDR should evolve into a more transformative model that not only resolves immediate disputes but also fosters resilience, emotional well-being, and a stronger social fabric in post-conflict societies.

Keywords: Community-Based Dispute Resolution (CBDR), Conflict Transformation, Counselling, Integration, Psychosocial Support, Indigenous Conflict Resolution, Trauma-Informed Mediation, Community Peacebuilding.

Introduction

Community-Based Dispute Resolution (CBDR) mechanisms have long served as vital tools for addressing interpersonal and communal conflicts, especially in societies where access to formal judicial systems may be limited (Zartman, 2000). They are often grounded in local customs, cultural values, and communal norms, offering approaches that are accessible, cost-effective, and culturally sensitive (Moore, 2014). However, despite their strengths, CBDR processes frequently focus on achieving settlements without adequately addressing the deep psychological and emotional wounds that conflicts can inflict on individuals and communities (Lambourne, 2014).

Conflicts, whether familial, communal, or resource-based, rarely exist solely in the material realm; they often carry profound emotional and relational consequences. Scholars such as Lederach (2003) have emphasized that genuine peacebuilding requires attending not only to the structural aspects of disputes but also to the relational and emotional dimensions that sustain or transform conflict. Without systematic mechanisms for healing emotional harm, settlements reached through CBDR may remain fragile, with unresolved grievances resurfacing over time (Lederach, 1995).

Integrating counselling practices into CBDR frameworks can help fill this critical gap. Counselling, as a professional and empathetic process, can assist disputants in processing trauma, expressing emotions constructively, and rebuilding trust (McCold, 2000). In contexts where community relationships are tightly interwoven and interdependence is high, neglecting the psychological dimensions of disputes can perpetuate cycles of conflict and mistrust (Johnstone, 2011).

This paper argues that incorporating counselling principles—such as active listening, emotional validation, and trauma-informed care—into CBDR mechanisms can lead to more holistic, durable resolutions. It draws on conflict transformation theory, which shifts the focus from mere resolution to transforming relationships and social structures that underlie conflict (Lederach, 2003). By grounding CBDR in both restorative justice and psychosocial support frameworks, communities can better address the full spectrum of needs that arise during conflict resolution (Zehr, 2002).

While the idea of integrating counselling may seem novel or even challenging in some

cultural contexts, emerging evidence from post-conflict societies and community peacebuilding initiatives indicates that holistic approaches yield more sustainable outcomes (Lambourne, 2014; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007). Therefore, it is imperative to consider not only how disputes are

settled but also how healing, reconciliation, and community well-being are fostered in the aftermath.

In sum, this paper contends that to move beyond superficial settlements, communities must embrace an integrated approach that combines the strengths of traditional dispute resolution with the psychosocial insights of counselling practice. This theoretical exploration sets the stage for envisioning practical, culturally adaptable models that acknowledge the centrality of human emotions in conflict and peacebuilding.

Conceptual Clarifications

Community-Based Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Addressing Root Causes and Building Resilience

The ultimate goal of integrating counselling into CBDR is not merely to resolve disputes but to address their root causes and prevent recurrence. Many community conflicts are symptoms of deeper wounds—intergenerational trauma, displacement, gender-based violence, or economic insecurity. Counselling-informed mediation helps to uncover and address these layers, providing a path toward more durable and meaningful peace.

By fostering emotional resilience, self-awareness, and interpersonal trust, integrated approaches empower individuals and communities to better navigate future tensions. As Lederach (2003) notes, true reconciliation involves building relationships capable of absorbing future shocks and disagreements. This requires more than procedural settlements; it requires spaces for emotional transformation, forgiveness, and healing.

Integrating counselling practices into Community-Based Dispute Resolution represents a vital evolution in how communities manage conflict and foster healing. By equipping mediators with trauma-informed skills, addressing mental health stigma, and respecting cultural practices, this approach provides a holistic framework for justice that is not only restorative but also transformative. As societies grapple with increasingly complex and emotionally charged conflicts, such integration offers a path forward that honors both the emotional and communal dimensions of peacebuilding.

Theoretical Framework

Rooted in conflict transformation theory (Lederach, 1995) and psychosocial support frameworks, this paper argues that addressing relational and emotional wounds is vital for genuine reconciliation and lasting peace. Conflict transformation theory, pioneered by Lederach (2003), proposes that conflicts are not isolated events but embedded in relationships, structures, and cultural contexts. It emphasizes transforming relationships, fostering constructive change, and

rebuilding trust. This perspective contrasts with traditional conflict resolution approaches that aim merely for short-term settlements (Lederach, 2003).

Psychosocial support theory complements this by focusing on the psychological and social

factors that shape how individuals and communities experience and recover from conflict and trauma (Lambourne, 2014). Counselling principles—such as empathetic listening, emotional validation, and trauma-informed care—draw directly from psychosocial models, offering practical methods to address invisible wounds (Herman, 1997).

Restorative justice theory also informs this framework. Scholars like Zehr (2002) argue that true justice must address harm, restore relationships, and reintegrate affected parties into the community. Integrating counselling into CBDR aligns with restorative principles, encouraging dialogue that acknowledges harm and promotes healing (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007).

Together, these theories present a holistic lens for understanding why emotional and relational dimensions are essential in community-based mechanisms. They highlight that without addressing underlying trauma, communities risk reproducing cycles of conflict, alienation, and mistrust. Therefore, this paper proposes an integrated theoretical framework that combines conflict transformation, psychosocial support, and restorative justice to guide how counselling practices can be meaningfully embedded into CBDR.

Integrating Counselling Practices into Community-Based Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Community-Based Dispute Resolution (CBDR) mechanisms are essential tools in fostering peace, social harmony, and justice, particularly in settings where formal judicial systems may be inaccessible or distrusted. CBDR often draws on traditional conflict resolution methods led by elders, religious leaders, or community mediators. However, as disputes increasingly carry layers of personal trauma, historical grievances, and psychological distress, these systems require an expanded skill set. This paper proposes a conceptual roadmap for embedding counselling principles within CBDR practices, arguing that such integration not only enhances the effectiveness of conflict resolution but also contributes to personal and communal healing.

Building on the theoretical foundations of restorative justice and trauma-informed care, the integration of counselling practices into CBDR mechanisms introduces critical tools such as active listening, empathy, non-judgmental communication, and trauma awareness. These skills allow mediators to move beyond the surface of a conflict and understand the underlying emotional dynamics that drive it. According to Herman (1997), trauma often shapes individuals' perceptions of justice and fairness, and without addressing these internal experiences, resolutions may feel incomplete or even re-traumatizing.

For instance, active listening enables mediators to not only hear but *feel* what a disputant is expressing, making space for emotional validation. Empathy ensures that parties feel seen and acknowledged, which can de-escalate tension and encourage openness. Trauma awareness equips mediators with the capacity to recognize signs of psychological distress, avoid triggering

responses, and provide support that prioritizes emotional safety. These elements form the bedrock of a more humane and holistic approach to community conflict resolution.

While some community leaders may already possess intuitive counselling traits, relying

solely on ad hoc practices is insufficient Herman (1997). Systematic capacity-building initiatives are necessary to embed counselling into CBDR in a sustainable and scalable way. Training programmes should include modules on psychological first aid, trauma-informed approaches, emotional intelligence, and conflict-sensitive counselling techniques.

Such programmes can be delivered through local NGOs, faith-based organizations, or university partnerships. McCold (2000) emphasizes the importance of training that is contextually relevant and experiential, using role-plays and simulations to model real-life mediation scenarios. When mediators are equipped with these tools, they become more adept at managing sensitive disclosures, identifying signs of unresolved trauma, and making appropriate referrals to mental health professionals when needed.

Importantly, training must also address the well-being of the mediators themselves. Many community leaders are exposed to repeated emotional stress, which can lead to burnout or secondary trauma. Providing spaces for supervision, peer support, and self-care practices ensures that those facilitating peace are also cared for and supported.

Beyond the mediators, there is a pressing need to shift community perceptions around counselling and mental health. In many cultural contexts, counselling is associated with personal weakness, shame, or even spiritual failing. These stigmas hinder individuals from seeking help or fully engaging in emotionally vulnerable dialogues during dispute resolution.

To address this, public education and community sensitization campaigns are essential. These campaigns can take various forms—radio dramas, storytelling sessions, school-based programmes, or religious sermons—depending on the cultural and communication norms of the community. The messaging should aim to normalize emotional expression and frame counselling as a culturally relevant, non-threatening form of communal support.

Zehr (2002) underscores the value of reframing counselling within local traditions of care and reciprocity. For example, if a community values collective healing rituals or elder-led storytelling, counselling practices can be introduced as an extension or enhancement of those traditions, rather than a foreign intervention. Such reframing helps reduce resistance and encourages broader acceptance.

Another pillar of effective integration is cultural flexibility. Counselling, especially when introduced from outside the community, must not override or invalidate local customs. Instead, it should adapt to existing cultural frameworks and enhance indigenous practices. This may involve working with traditional healers, spiritual leaders, or elders to co-create trauma-informed rituals or storytelling methods that align with both psychological and cultural understandings of healing.

For example, in some indigenous settings, healing circles or community dialogues already

serve a therapeutic function. By embedding counselling principles—such as confidentiality, emotional validation, and safety protocols—into these existing practices, communities can deepen their impact without compromising cultural authenticity. Lambourne (2014) suggests that such

hybrid approaches can strengthen both local ownership and the psychological effectiveness of reconciliation efforts.

Additionally, the inclusion of women, youth, and other often-marginalized groups in these integrated practices is crucial. Their perspectives and emotional experiences may differ significantly from those of traditional power holders, and counselling-informed approaches can create safer spaces for their participation.

Proposed Integration Model

This paper proposes a theoretical model that outlines practical pathways for embedding counselling practices into CBDR structures:

1. Training community mediators in counselling principles: Equipping mediators with foundational skills in active listening, empathy, and trauma-informed care enables them to respond more holistically to disputants' emotional needs (McCold, 2000; Herman, 1997).
2. Building informal support networks: Communities can establish peer support groups, trusted elders, or volunteer counsellors who provide basic psychosocial support and create safe spaces for dialogue. This aligns with restorative justice ideas that healing must occur within the community (Zehr, 2002).
3. Encouraging supportive policies: Local and national policies should acknowledge the emotional dimensions of disputes. Frameworks that integrate mental health support, capacity-building funds, and partnerships with professional counsellors can strengthen CBDR outcomes (Lambourne, 2014; Lederach, 2003). By combining training, informal support, and policy recognition, communities can develop a robust, adaptable model that fosters deeper reconciliation and social cohesion.

Suggestions

i. Community mediators, traditional leaders, and dispute resolution practitioners should receive training in basic counselling skills such as active listening, empathy, emotional validation, and trauma-informed communication.

ii. Community-Based Dispute Resolution mechanisms should incorporate psychosocial support services to address emotional trauma and stress associated with conflicts.

iii. Community education programmes should be implemented to reduce stigma associated with counselling and mental health support.

iv. Counselling practices integrated into CBDR should be culturally adaptable and respectful of indigenous conflict resolution traditions.

v. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community development institutions should develop policies that recognize and support the integration of counselling into community dispute resolution mechanisms.

Conclusion

Combining counselling practices with Community-Based Dispute Resolution (CBDR) can

transform how communities address conflict, moving beyond surface-level settlements to genuine healing and restoration. By grounding CBDR in conflict transformation, restorative justice, and psychosocial support theories, this paper has argued that emotional and relational aspects of disputes are not peripheral but central to sustainable peace.

A theoretical integration of counselling offers communities practical tools for processing trauma, rebuilding trust, and strengthening social bonds. While challenges such as stigma and resource constraints exist, these can be mitigated through culturally sensitive training, community education, and supportive policies.

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TEACHER EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COMMUNITY CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ABIA

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Abstract

This study examined teacher educators' perspectives on the role of emotional intelligence in community conflict resolution in Abia State, Nigeria. Despite the growing recognition of emotional intelligence as essential in education, teacher training programmes rarely integrate it formally, leaving educators unprepared to mediate community disputes. A qualitative exploratory design was used, involving 23 experienced teacher educators from Abia State University Uturu and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. Participants were selected based on their involvement in community engagements and minimum of five years of teaching experience. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document review, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that educators understand emotional intelligence primarily as empathy, self-regulation, and patience, though few reference formal models. They apply these competencies in mediating parent-teacher conflicts, religious tensions, and land disputes, often using active listening and collaborative strategies. Key enablers include personal experience, cultural values like 'Otu Oma', and community trust in educators. Major barriers include lack of institutional support, absence of training, and fear of social backlash. The study underscores the need for formal integration of emotional intelligence into teacher education curricula to strengthen conflict resolution capacity.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, community conflict resolution, teacher educators, teacher education, Abia State.

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as a vital competency in education,

leadership, and social interaction. It involves recognizing, understanding, managing, and influencing one's own emotions and those of others (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 2021). Scholars argue that EI is essential for professional success, especially in fields requiring strong interpersonal skills. Teaching, particularly in teacher education, demands skills such as empathy, self-regulation, active listening, and conflict mediation, all rooted in emotional intelligence (Brackett, Rivers & Salovey, 2020). Teacher educators hold a unique role in shaping future teachers' knowledge while modeling professional behaviours and emotional resilience. Their emotional competencies significantly influence how pre-service teachers manage classroom dynamics and community relationships (Oke, Adeyemo & Adedoyin, 2023). By demonstrating EI, teacher educators create a culture of respect and dialogue that extends beyond the classroom.

In Abia State, Nigeria, community conflicts are common, particularly in educational settings. Disputes arise over school placements, curriculum content, and cultural differences. Schools can become flashpoints during political tensions or communal disagreements, especially in areas like Umuahia North (Nwosu & Eze, 2022). These conflicts can disrupt learning and erode trust between schools and communities, making emotionally intelligent leadership essential.

Despite its importance, many Nigerian educational institutions, including teacher training colleges, do not integrate EI into their curricula or professional development programmes (Adeyemo, 2021). Cognitive and technical skills are prioritized, leaving emotional competencies often unaddressed. This gap is concerning given the complex social interactions in schools. Without structured support, teacher educators may rely on personal experience or intuition, leading to inconsistent conflict resolution outcomes. Research indicates that individuals with higher EI tend to be more effective in resolving conflicts. They listen actively, manage their reactions, empathize with differing views, and seek collaborative solutions (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2020). In community settings, these traits can de-escalate tensions and promote long-term peace. For teacher educators, who often mediate between schools and local leaders, EI is a powerful tool for fostering harmony.

The relevance of EI in African contexts is supported by indigenous values emphasizing communal living and respect. Concepts like Ubuntu (I am because we are) and Igbo principles such as Otu Oma (the Ideal Group) reflect emotional wisdom aligned with modern EI frameworks (Mbigi, 2022; Ezeanya, 2023). Integrating these cultural strengths with formal EI training could enhance conflict resolution strategies in Abia State. Despite the growing interest in EI, there remains a research gap regarding its application by teacher educators in Nigerian communities, with most studies focusing on students or practicing teachers (Oke et al., 2023).

This study sought to explore how teacher educators in Abia State perceive and use emotional

intelligence in community conflict resolution.

Statement of the Problem

Although EI is recognized as important in education, it is rarely institutionalized in Nigerian teacher preparation programmes. Many educators lack formal training in emotional competencies and conflict management (Adeyemo, 2021). Consequently, their ability to navigate community conflicts often depends more on personal temperament than professional skill. This lack of structured support limits their effectiveness as peacebuilders. In Abia State, the absence of emotionally intelligent leadership can exacerbate disputes. Teacher educators, often called to mediate conflicts, may lack the necessary tools (Nwosu & Eze, 2022). Without insights into their understanding of EI, policymakers cannot design effective interventions to strengthen EI in teacher education.

Research Questions

- How do teacher educators define and understand emotional intelligence?
- In what ways do they apply emotional intelligence in resolving community conflicts?
- What factors influence their use of emotional intelligence in conflict resolution?

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Emotional intelligence is the capacity to monitor one's own and others' emotions and to use this information to guide thinking and behaviour (Mayer et al., 2021). Two dominant models shape contemporary understanding. The ability model treats emotional intelligence as a set of cognitive skills involving perception, use, understanding, and management of emotions (Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2020). This model positions emotional intelligence as a measurable intelligence. Goleman's mixed model combines emotional competencies with personality traits and social skills, emphasizing practical applications in leadership and interpersonal relationships (Goleman et. al, 2020).

Community conflict resolution refers to processes through which disagreements are addressed and resolved. Conflicts may be interpersonal or intergroup, and effective resolution relies on communication, trust, and emotional awareness (Folger, Poole and Stutman, 2023). Teacher educators are professionals who prepare future teachers. In many Nigerian communities they are respected figures, often consulted during local disputes (Adeyemo, 2021). Their involvement in community affairs positions them as informal mediators, making their emotional competence a vital asset in conflict resolution and prevention.

Theoretical Review

Mayer and Salovey's (1997) model comprise of four interrelated branches: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions

(Mayer et al., 2020). This structure provides a clear way to assess emotional skills in high-stakes environments. Goleman expands this into five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman et al., 2020). These components are especially relevant in community settings where emotional sensitivity can prevent escalation.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument identifies five conflict-handling styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating (Folger et al., 2023). Individuals with high emotional intelligence tend to favor collaborative or compromising styles. Emotional intelligence supports the shift from adversarial to constructive conflict resolution by enhancing self-control, empathy, and communication. When combined, these theories show that emotional intelligence enables individuals to stay calm, listen deeply, and respond in ways that reduce tension (Brackett et al., 2020).

Emotional Intelligence in Education

In educational settings, emotional intelligence shapes classroom dynamics and institutional culture. Teachers with high emotional intelligence manage student behaviour better and build inclusive environments (Oke et al., 2023). They address root causes of misbehaviour rather than reacting impulsively. Studies in Nigerian secondary schools show that emotionally intelligent teachers report fewer disciplinary issues and higher job satisfaction (Adeyemo, 2021). They are also more effective in handling conflicts with parents.

Teacher educators carry even greater responsibility because they model professional behaviour. When a teacher educator demonstrates patience or emotional resilience, they are teaching more than conflict resolution (Oke et al., 2023). Pre-service teachers observe these behaviours and often replicate them in their own careers.

Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution in Community Settings

Beyond the classroom, emotional intelligence is a vital tool in community conflict resolution. In Nigeria, communal disputes over land, religion, or politics are not uncommon. Emotionally intelligent leaders can serve as bridges between opposing groups (Nwosu & Eze, 2022). Their ability to remain neutral and express empathy creates space for dialogue. De-escalation begins with emotional regulation. A mediator who stays calm prevents the spread of anxiety and anger. Active listening helps parties feel heard and validated (Folger et al., 2023). Empathy allows the mediator to understand each side's fears and motivations. These are all core components of emotional intelligence.

In West Africa, peacebuilding initiatives have increasingly incorporated emotional intelligence training. In Sierra Leone, post conflict programmes trained educators and youth leaders to support reconciliation (Kamara & Conteh, 2021). In Ghana, community mediators used emotional intelligence techniques to resolve chieftaincy disputes (Osei-Hwedie & Nkansah,

2023). Cultural values in Nigeria also align with emotional intelligence. The Igbo concept of *Otu*

Oma emphasizes wisdom and communal responsibility, while Ubuntu highlights interconnectedness and empathy (Ezeanya, 2023; Mbigi, 2022).

Teacher Educators as Mediators in Community Conflicts

Teacher educators often occupy positions of trust in their communities. They are seen as educated, impartial, and morally upright. When conflicts arise over school policies or student conduct, community members may turn to them for guidance. Their role is not officially recognized, but it is socially accepted. Their training in communication and human development gives them an advantage in understanding group dynamics. Yet without formal emotional intelligence training, their interventions may lack consistency (Adeyemo, 2021).

Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite growing research on emotional intelligence, significant gaps remain. Most Nigerian studies focus on students or practicing teachers (Oke et al., 2023). Few examine teacher educators, even though they shape the next generation of educators. There is almost no research on how these educators apply emotional intelligence in community conflict resolution, particularly in Southeast Nigeria.

No known study has specifically explored emotional intelligence among teacher educators in Abia State. The region's unique socio-cultural context—marked by strong communal ties and periodic tensions—warrants focused investigation. Existing literature relies heavily on quantitative surveys, leaving out lived experiences and personal insights. A clear need exists for qualitative, localized research that captures how teacher educators understand and use emotional intelligence in real-world conflicts. This study aimed to fill that gap by providing rich, context-specific data from Abia State.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative exploratory design grounded in phenomenological and descriptive approaches. Phenomenology explores how individuals make sense of experiences in emotionally complex situations (Smith & Shinebourne, 2021), while the descriptive component provides a structured account of emotional intelligence within institutional contexts. This approach enables themes to emerge from participants' own words (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

The research is conducted in Abia State, Nigeria, at Abia State University, Uturu and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. These institutions are key centers for teacher education where academic staff often engage with local community dynamics. From a population of 301 teacher educators, 23 participants were purposively selected based on teaching experience, community engagement, and conflict mediation roles. Snowball sampling further identified educators with relevant expertise.

Data collection involved in depth interview, focus group discussions, and document review.

Semi structured interviews allowed flexibility to probe personal experiences, while focus groups

revealed shared perspectives among educators. Relevant documents were reviewed to supplement and triangulate findings (Bowen, 2020). Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six phase approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022), with NVivo software used to manage coding. Member checking and peer review validated the themes.

Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2023). Researcher bias was acknowledged through reflexivity and journaling.

Results

Table 1: *Teacher Educators' Understanding of Emotional Intelligence (Research Question 1)*

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Sample Verbatim Responses
Ability to manage one's emotions	18	"It's about staying calm when things get heated."
Understanding others' feelings	15	"You must listen to why a parent is angry, not just react."
Empathy and compassion in relationships	14	"Putting yourself in someone else's shoes makes a big difference."
Emotional intelligence as patience	10	"Sometimes, you just have to wait and not answer rudeness with rudeness."
Confusion with general temperament	6	"I've always been calm, so maybe I've got it naturally."
Formal knowledge of EI models	3	"I read about Goleman's work during my PhD."

In Table 1, the majority of teacher educators associate emotional intelligence with emotional regulation and empathy. Most describe it in practical, experience-based terms rather

than theoretical concepts. A small number demonstrate awareness of formal EI frameworks, but this is not widespread. The concept is often equated with personal traits like patience

rather than learned skills.

Table 2: *Application of Emotional Intelligence in Community Conflict Resolution (Research Question 2)*

EI Component	Conflict Scenario	Application Method	Frequency of Use (n=23)
Empathy	Parent-teacher dispute over student suspension	Listened first, acknowledged emotions before presenting facts	21 times
Self-regulation	Heated PTA meeting with angry community members	Remained calm, paused before responding, avoided sarcasm	19 times
Active listening	Dispute between school and community over land use	Repeated concerns back to parties, asked clarifying questions	20 times
Social skills (mediation)	Religious tension in a mixed school	Facilitated dialogue session, set ground rules	14 times
Emotional awareness	Internal faculty disagreement affecting school image	Recognized rising tension and called for private discussion	12 times

In Table, 2, teacher educators frequently apply empathy, self-regulation, and active listening in conflict situations. These skills are used most during parent and community engagements. Mediation and emotional awareness are applied less frequently, often only when the educator perceives the conflict as escalating. Most interventions are reactive rather than preventive.

Table 3: *Factors Influencing the Use of Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Resolution (Research Question 3)*

Factor	Influence Type	Description from Respondents	Number of Mentions
Years of experience	Positive	"The more you go through, the less you panic."	17
Personal disposition	Positive/Mixed	"I've always been soft-spoken, so it helps." / "But sometimes I still get angry."	15
Lack of formal training	Negative	"Nobody taught us how to handle angry parents or community leaders."	20
Institutional support	Limited	"The school doesn't have a conflict policy. You're on your own."	18
Community respect for educators	Positive	"People listen because they see us as elders or educated ones."	16
Fear of backlash	Negative	"If you take sides, you lose friends or get labeled."	13
Religious or cultural values	Positive	"Our tradition teaches us to seek peace and avoid quarrels."	14

In Table 3, experience and community respect empower educators to use emotional intelligence effectively. However, the absence of formal training and institutional guidelines limits consistent application. Personal temperament helps, but it is not a substitute for structured support. Fear of social consequences sometimes discourages involvement, even when mediation is needed.

Discussion

The findings in Table 1 reveal that most teacher educators understand emotional intelligence

as the ability to manage personal emotions and empathize with others. This practical, experience-based understanding reflects the core of Mayer, Caruso and Salovey's (2021) ability model. However, only a few participants referenced formal frameworks. This indicates that their knowledge is intuitive rather than academic. The tendency to equate emotional intelligence with patience or calmness supports Goleman et al., (2020) argument that personal dispositions are frequently mistaken for structured emotional competencies.

Table 2 shows that empathy, self-regulation, and active listening are the most frequently applied emotional intelligence components in community conflicts. The educators' approach of listening first and responding later demonstrates emotional facilitation of thinking, a key aspect of Mayer, Roberts and Barsade's (2020) framework. Their preference for collaborative strategies corresponds with the Thomas-Kilmann conflict model (Folger et al., 2023). However, the reactive nature of these interventions highlights a gap in proactive conflict management.

Table 3 identifies both enabling and limiting factors. The positive influence of years of experience supports Oke et al., (2023) finding that emotional resilience grows with professional exposure. Cultural values such as respect for educators echo Mbigi's (2022) assertion that African communal philosophies support emotional wisdom. Yet the widespread lack of formal training and institutional support confirms a systemic weakness in teacher education (Bowen, 2020). Fear of backlash also suggests that social risks may deter the use of emotional intelligence skills (Kamara & Conteh, 2021).

Recommendations

- Government should mandate the National Commission for Colleges of Education and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund to integrate emotional intelligence modules into the national teacher education curriculum.
- University administrators should establish mandatory professional development programmes in emotional intelligence, communication, and mediation for all teacher educators. These programs must be linked to career progression and supported by dedicated conflict mediation units within faculties of education.
- Teacher educators should proactively seek formal training in emotional intelligence through workshops, online courses, or peer learning circles. They must model emotionally intelligent behaviours in classrooms and community engagements to influence pre-service teachers.
- Faculties of education should expose pre-service teachers to emotional intelligence-based teaching methods during practicum. Guided community engagement and supervised conflict mediation must form part of their training experience.

Conclusion

This study has shed light on the critical yet informal role emotional intelligence plays in how

teacher educators in Abia State navigate community conflicts. These educators are frequently called upon to mediate disputes involving parents, community leaders, and school authorities. Their use of emotional intelligence is largely intuitive rather than institutionally supported. Empathy, self-regulation, active listening, and social awareness are commonly applied in conflict situations. These practices align with established models of emotional intelligence by Mayer et al. (2021) and Goleman et al. (2020), even if the educators do not reference them explicitly.

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming mental health service delivery through automated screening, conversational agents, predictive analytics, and clinical decision-support systems. While these technologies promise expanded access and efficiency, their integration into counselling psychology raises profound philosophical and ethical questions. Counselling psychology is grounded in relational presence, empathic modification, and human growth, principles that may appear at odds with algorithmic mediation. This paper critically examines AI integration through a synthesized framework combining Rogers' person-centred theory, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and African relational philosophy, particularly Ubuntu ethics. It argues that AI should function as augmentative support rather than a substitute for therapeutic presence. Special attention is given to African contexts, where infrastructural disparities, communal ontologies of personhood, and concerns about digital colonialism shape technology adoption. A Hybrid Relational–AI Integration Model is proposed, emphasizing human relational anchoring, structured technological augmentation, ethical oversight, and culturally adaptive design. The paper concludes that responsible AI integration requires not technological enthusiasm or resistance, but disciplined governance grounded in humanistic and communal values. Counselling psychology's future depends on preserving relational authenticity while navigating digital transformation.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, counselling psychology, Ubuntu, digital mental health, ethics, Africa, technology adoption.

Introduction

The digitization of healthcare has accelerated dramatically over the past decade, reshaping clinical practice, documentation systems, and patient engagement. Artificial intelligence now

contributes to symptom screening, suicide risk prediction, automated note generation, and structured therapeutic dialogue. In mental health contexts, AI-driven platforms are increasingly deployed to provide scalable cognitive-behavioural interventions, monitor mood patterns, and

offer 24-hour conversational support.

For counselling psychology, these developments generate both opportunity and unease. Unlike disciplines primarily structured around diagnostic efficiency or pharmacological management, counselling psychology is historically rooted in relational depth, empathic understanding, and the subjective meaning-making process. Therapeutic effectiveness is not understood merely as the application of technique but as the emergence of growth within an authentic relational encounter.

This raises a fundamental question: can systems that operate through probabilistic pattern recognition meaningfully participate in processes traditionally grounded in human presence?

The urgency of this inquiry is heightened within African contexts. Many African countries face severe shortages of trained mental health professionals, particularly in rural and economically marginalized regions. AI-based platforms are frequently presented as scalable solutions capable of bridging service gaps at reduced cost. Yet counselling psychology within African settings is not simply a technical service model; it is often embedded within communal, spiritual, and relational worldviews that differ significantly from the individualistic assumptions underlying many Western-designed AI systems.

This paper does not adopt a polarized stance of technological optimism or resistance. Rather, it argues that AI integration must be philosophically interrogated, ethically governed, and culturally grounded. By synthesizing Rogers' person-centred theory, the Technology Acceptance Model, and African relational philosophy, particularly Ubuntu,the paper advances a Hybrid Relational–AI Integration Model suitable for African counselling contexts.

Artificial Intelligence in Mental Health: Conceptual Clarifications

Artificial intelligence refers to computational systems capable of performing tasks associated with human cognition, including pattern recognition, predictive modelling, and natural language processing. Within mental health services, AI applications have expanded rapidly and now encompass several domains. Conversational agents and chatbots deliver structured psycho-education, cognitive restructuring prompts, behavioural activation exercises, and mood tracking tools. Predictive analytics systems analyse linguistic patterns, digital behaviour, or clinical records to identify markers associated with depression or suicidal ideation. Clinical decision-support systems assist practitioners through diagnostic suggestions and documentation automation. Emerging technologies attempt to infer affective states through speech patterns, typing rhythms, or facial micro-expressions.

While these tools demonstrate functional sophistication, it is essential to distinguish between simulation and phenomenological experience. AI systems generate outputs based on statistical correlations within training datasets. They do not possess consciousness, moral agency, or

embodied intentionality. An algorithm may reproduce empathic phrasing, yet it does not encounter a client as a subject.

Empirical evidence suggests moderate efficacy of AI-supported cognitive-behavioural interventions for mild-to-moderate distress. However, the literature remains limited regarding complex trauma, culturally embedded suffering, severe psychopathology, or relational disruptions rooted in communal contexts. These limitations underscore the need for theoretical and ethical reflection rather than uncritical adoption.

Theoretical Review

Rogers' Person-Centred Theory: The Primacy of Authentic Presence

Rogers' person-centred theory conceptualizes therapeutic change as emerging from specific relational conditions: empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard. Empathy, in Rogers' account, is not merely an accurate reflection but an experiential immersion in the client's internal frame of reference. Congruence requires therapist authenticity, while unconditional positive regard affirms the intrinsic worth of the individual.Within this framework, therapeutic transformation is relationally constituted. Growth unfolds when individuals feel genuinely understood and accepted within a psychologically safe environment.

AI systems challenge this premise. While they may replicate empathic language structures, they lack intentional subjectivity. The critical question is therefore not whether AI can produce supportive responses, but whether therapeutic change requires moral and relational accountability that only humans possess.A defensible synthesis recognizes that certain structured components of therapy, psycho-education, behavioural rehearsal, and cognitive reframing may be technologically facilitated. However, existential validation and corrective emotional experiences remain anchored in human encounter.Thus, from a person-centred perspective, AI must function as an augmentation rather than a replacement.

The Technology Acceptance Model: Practitioner Adoption and Professional Identity

While Rogers' framework addresses therapeutic validity, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains behavioural adoption dynamics. TAM proposes that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use predict technology uptake. However, in counselling psychology, additional mediators shape adoption decisions.Practitioners may perceive efficiency benefits yet experience identity conflict if AI appears to commodify care. Professional congruence, alignment between technology use and core therapeutic values, becomes central. Ethical safety perception, regulatory clarity, and liability boundaries also influence acceptance.

In African contexts, infrastructural feasibility, digital literacy, and cultural resonance further mediate perceived usefulness. A technologically advanced system that disregards communal healing norms may be viewed as professionally incongruent despite functional benefits.

Integrating Rogers and TAM yields a dual-layer evaluative framework:

1. **Relational Validity Layer** – Does AI preserve therapeutic authenticity?

2. **Adoption Behaviour Layer** – Do practitioners perceive alignment with professional and cultural commitments?

African Relational Philosophy: Ubuntu, Personhood, and Communal Healing

To ground this discussion regionally, African philosophical traditions must be engaged substantively rather than symbolically. John Mbiti's formulation—"I am because we are"—articulates a relational ontology in which personhood is constituted through community. Psychological well-being is therefore intertwined with relational harmony rather than exclusively internal states. Similarly, African psychology scholars such as Nwoye (2015) emphasize the reconstruction of communal narratives and spiritual continuity in healing processes. Distress may be interpreted within relational or cosmological frameworks that exceed individual symptom categorization.

Thaddeus Metz's moral theory of Ubuntu frames personhood as achieved through participation in harmonious relationships characterized by empathy and reciprocity.

Moral agency requires relational accountability, an attribute AI systems lack. When Rogers' relational authenticity is considered alongside Ubuntu's communal ontology, a powerful convergence emerges. Both traditions reject reductionist views of human flourishing. Both centre relationship as constitutive rather than instrumental. This convergence strengthens the argument that AI may assist with structured intervention elements but cannot substitute for morally accountable relational presence.

African Contextual Realities: Access, Infrastructure, and Epistemic Sovereignty

Discussions of AI in global mental health frequently frame African contexts primarily through a lens of scarcity, shortages of clinicians, funding constraints, and limited service reach. While these realities are significant, such framing risks reinforcing a deficit narrative that overlooks the complexities of epistemology, culture, and governance. Mental health conceptualizations across African societies are often embedded within communal, spiritual, and relational frameworks. Distress may be interpreted in relation to family disharmony, ancestral disconnection, social exclusion, or moral rupture. Counselling interventions, therefore, frequently extend beyond dyadic therapist–client encounters to include family systems, community elders, or faith leaders. AI systems designed around individualized symptom tracking and self-directed cognitive restructuring may insufficiently account for these communal dimensions.

Infrastructure disparities further complicate technological adoption. Rural and peri-urban communities may experience unstable internet connectivity, inconsistent electricity supply, and limited access to smart phones or secure data storage platforms. The assumption that AI-based platforms are universally accessible obscures persistent digital divides. A further layer concerns data governance and epistemic sovereignty. When behavioural data from African users is stored on external servers and incorporated into proprietary systems without local oversight, the issue transcends privacy concerns. It becomes a matter of digital colonialism: extraction without

quitable participation in ownership, interpretation, or regulatory control. Responsible AI integration requires regionally grounded data protection frameworks, transparent algorithmic accountability, and participatory design processes involving African scholars and practitioners.

Thus, AI integration in African counselling contexts must be understood not merely as a clinical decision but as a socio-political and epistemological matter.

Ethical and Governance Challenges

The integration of AI into counselling psychology introduces multi-layered ethical considerations that extend beyond conventional confidentiality concerns.

Data Sovereignty and Confidentiality

Psychological data are among the most sensitive categories of personal information. AI platforms often rely on cloud-based storage, third-party analytics, and algorithmic training pipelines. These systems create vulnerabilities related to data breaches, secondary data use, and cross-jurisdictional regulation. In contexts where data protection laws are evolving, ambiguity regarding ownership and liability can undermine trust.

Ethically responsible implementation demands explicit informed consent regarding algorithmic involvement, data storage location, and potential secondary use in system training. Encryption standards and regional regulatory alignment are essential.

Algorithmic Bias and Cultural Validity

AI models are only as representative as the datasets on which they are trained. Systems developed primarily using Western clinical populations may misinterpret culturally normative expressions of distress, resilience, or spirituality. Linguistic nuances in African languages may not map onto Western diagnostic taxonomies embedded within training data.

Without culturally diverse datasets and bias auditing, AI systems risk reinforcing structural inequities under the guise of neutrality. Cultural misinterpretation may lead to inappropriate risk flagging or therapeutic recommendations.

Therapeutic De-Skilling

A subtler risk involves the gradual erosion of clinical judgment. Automated diagnostic prompts and risk assessment alerts may encourage overreliance on algorithmic authority. Over time, practitioners may internalize technological scaffolding as default guidance rather than reflective support.

Maintaining professional competence requires positioning AI as advisory rather than determinative. Final interpretive authority must remain with trained clinicians.

Emotional Substitution and Dependency

Conversational agents capable of responsive dialogue may foster attachment-like experiences, particularly among vulnerable individuals experiencing loneliness. While such

systems may offer temporary relief, prolonged reliance could inadvertently substitute technological interaction for human relational engagement. Ethical deployment requires clarity regarding the limits of AI-mediated support.

The Hybrid Relational–AI Integration Model

In response to these challenges, this paper advances a Hybrid Relational–AI Integration Model grounded in humanistic integrity and Ubuntu-informed ethics.

Human Therapist as Relational Anchor

The counsellor remains central as the moral and relational agent responsible for therapeutic direction. AI tools may inform practice, but responsibility for interpretation, intervention choice, and relational engagement rests with the therapist.

Therapeutic presence characterized by empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard, cannot be outsourced. Within Ubuntu ethics, relational accountability defines moral personhood. AI lacks moral agency and therefore cannot substitute for this responsibility.

AI as Structured Augmentation

AI may support structured components of therapy, including:

- ♦ Psycho-education modules
- ♦ Behavioural tracking and reminders
- ♦ Session summarization and documentation
- ♦ Preliminary risk alerts

Such functions can reduce administrative burden and enhance consistency. However, structured augmentation must not eclipse narrative co-construction or contextual meaning-making.

Continuous Ethical Oversight

Implementation requires dynamic governance mechanisms, including:

- ♦ Bias auditing procedures
- ♦ Transparent algorithmic documentation
- ♦ Clear consent protocols
- ♦ Periodic ethical review committees

In African contexts, these mechanisms should involve regional academic institutions and professional bodies to ensure contextual accountability.

Ubuntu-Aligned Cultural Safeguards

AI platforms deployed within African counselling settings should incorporate features that reflect communal orientation. Examples may include family-inclusive modules, culturally

adaptive language frameworks, and flexible narrative input structures that accommodate spiritual interpretations of distress.

Rather than importing fixed technological architectures, co-design approaches should involve

community stakeholders in development and evaluation processes.

This model reframes AI integration as structured coexistence grounded in relational ethics.

Competency Development and Professional Reform

Responsible integration requires transformation within training and regulatory structures and Curriculum Reform. Counselling psychology programmes should incorporate:

- ♦ Digital ethics and data governance education
- ♦ Algorithmic literacy and bias recognition
- ♦ Interdisciplinary collaboration with technology developers
- ♦ Reflective seminars on technological impact on therapeutic identity

Students should critically examine not only how to use AI, but also when its use is inappropriate.

Professional Regulation

African counselling associations and regulatory boards should develop explicit guidelines addressing:

- ♦ AI-assisted interventions
- ♦ Documentation automation
- ♦ Liability boundaries
- ♦ Cross-border data governance

Ethical codes must evolve alongside technological capabilities to prevent regulatory ambiguity.

Future Research Directions

Empirical research must accompany conceptual development.

Key priorities include:

- ♦ Longitudinal comparisons of therapeutic alliance quality in hybrid versus traditional modalities
- ♦ Cross-cultural validation of AI interpretive accuracy across African linguistic groups
- ♦ Participatory design research involving community representatives
- ♦ Ethical impact assessments examining unintended dependency effects

African-based research institutions should lead such studies to prevent epistemic dependence on externally generated datasets.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is reshaping the landscape of mental health care. For counselling psychology, the challenge is neither uncritical embrace nor categorical rejection. Instead, the

profession must exercise philosophical clarity and ethical discipline. When examined through Rogers' relational framework and Ubuntu's communal ontology, a consistent conclusion emerges: therapeutic transformation is relationally constituted and morally accountable. AI systems, while functionally sophisticated, cannot assume moral agency or embodied presence.

However, this limitation does not render AI irrelevant. Properly governed, culturally adapted, and relationally subordinated to human oversight, AI can extend access, enhance efficiency, and support structured interventions. The future of counselling psychology, particularly within African contexts, depends on balancing technological innovation with humanistic integrity. AI should expand human reach, not displace human presence. The decisive factor will not be technological capability, but ethical governance grounded in relational philosophy.

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INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES ON MENTAL HEALTH OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which psychological variables influence mental health among postgraduate students in South-South Nigeria. One research question and one null hypothesis guided the study. A correlational research design was adopted. The sample comprised 1,167 postgraduate students (671 males and 496 females) selected through multistage sampling from a population of 5,906 postgraduate students in five federal universities in South-South Nigeria. Two researcher-developed instruments, Psychological Variables Scale (PVS) and Postgraduate Student Mental Health Questionnaire (PSMHQ), were validated by experts in clinical psychology, counselling, and measurement and evaluation. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.92 and 0.88 for PVS and PSMHQ respectively. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer the research question and Multiple Regression Analysis to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a significant joint influence of psychological variables (anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger) on mental health among postgraduate students, accounting for 99.8% of the variance in mental health. The study concludes that psychological variables are strong predictors of mental health among postgraduate students. It is recommended that universities in South-South Nigeria should establish functional counselling centres, employ professional mental health counsellors, and implement regular psychological assessment and intervention programmes to improve students' mental health and academic well-being.

Keywords: Mental Health, Postgraduate Students, anxiety, depression and self-esteem

Introduction

Counselling is a way of helping people to discover the solutions to their own personal, social, emotional or interpersonal problems. Counselling is not advising, nor doing the work on behalf of the counsellor. In counselling, counsellor enables a client to look at problems objectively. They shows

different angles to see things. They makes a client realize his/her strength and weaknesses without being judgmental. Counselling is the practice of exploring problems in an environment that is supportive and objective. It is also the practice of discovering other ways of actions that can resolve an issue. Counsellor offers coping strategies for altering patterns of distressing cognitions, emotions

and behavior of an individual.

Mental health is a part of our successful life and our overall well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) states that there is no health without mental health. Our capability depends on our mental health. It is the center of our group and individual strength as human beings in order to reach our optimal potential. Mental well-being refers to the way we are aware of our strengths so we can deal with life challenges in a positive way. If someone is emotionally stable there, then he will be able to work effectively and contributes to his or her society. There are several reasons that can affect our emotional stability. These are genes, chronic stress, illness, and traumatic experiences. Environmental issues such as the economic, political and social weather canal so too do impact. Mental health issues have a great influence on how we think, feel and behave. They may be from our everyday day to day concerns we all suffer at some point in time, to more serious issues. The Mental Health Foundation (MHF) affirm that there are two major forms of mental health problems (Matliwala, 2017). Neurotic symptoms and Psychotic symptoms. Neurotic symptoms tend to suffer from typical mental illness' are very likely to suffer from neurotic symptoms. They are extreme expressions of 'normal' emotions, such as worry, sadness and stress. We all get anxious or depressed sometimes, but if they start affecting daily life, then it might be a sign of a mental illness. If mental illness goes unchecked, it will bring more problems. Neurotic symptoms characterize mental health disorders as follows: Depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic disorders.

Psychotic symptoms refers to mental health issues with psychotic symptoms are less common. Psychotic symptoms interfere with a person's perception of reality. It may include hallucinations of the things. Such as seeing, smelling, hearing or feeling things that no one else can. Individuals who suffer from psychosis tend to develop illogical perceptions regarding themselves, other individuals and the world at large. Psychotic symptoms are experienced in the following mental illness conditions: Schizophrenia, eating disorders, substance abuse, bipolar disorder, Personality disorder. There is no fixed list of signs and symptoms of mental illness. Some of the common signs to look out for are as follows. Withdrawal from society, Teary-eyed, Reduced productivity, Weight loss or weight gain, Dirty or unkempt, Tired, Slurred speech, spending excessive money.

Baum and Fleming (2013) showed that counselling services in schools have been useful to resolve the academic problems of students. Khodaei (2017) showed that group counselling has been effective in decreasing student's anxiety. This study focused on influence of psychological variables on mental health of postgraduate students in South-South, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Mental health of postgraduate students in Nigeria is an issue of high importance owing to its strong correlation with academic success and based on the reality that higher education is key to

human and economic progress in the developing world. Strong epidemiological data are needed to formulate efficacious campus-based interventions, inform context-specific policies, and prioritize, especially in resource-constrained environments like Nigeria where limited resources have to be targeted to interventions of highest yield. However, studies on the epidemiology of student mental health are predominantly from high-income countries.

There is growing concern at the international level about the mental health of postgraduate students with one multinational study carried out in 19 colleges across 8 countries reporting lifetime and 12-month prevalence estimates for CMDs of 35 % and 31 %, respectively. The present study examined influence of psychological factors on mental health of postgraduate students in South-South, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out the influence of psychological variables on mental health of postgraduate students in South-South, Nigeria. This study specifically sought to:

1. determine the influence of psychological variables (Anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger) on mental health of postgraduate students in South-South, Nigeria.

Research Question

. What is the influence of psychological variables (Anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger) on mental health of postgraduate students in South-South, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

HO_1: There is no significant influence of psychological variables (Anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger) on mental health of postgraduate students in South-South, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study employed a correlation research design. The research sample was 1,167 (671 males and 496 female) obtained using multistage sampling techniques out of 5,906 postgraduate students in five federal universities in South-South, Nigeria. Two instrument namely Psychological Counselling Scale (PCS) and Postgraduate Student Mental Health Questionnaire (PSMHQ) were developed by researcher and validated by three experts who include one Clinical Psychologist, one Counsellor and one Measurement and Evaluation expert all from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka respectively.

Common psychological counselling problems were Anxiety, depression, sadness and loneliness, hopelessness, self-esteem and self-esteem, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, adjustment and home-sickness and anger emotions. The instruments' reliability was

determined using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and reliability coefficients obtained for Psychological Counselling Scale (PCS) and Postgraduate Student Mental Health Questionnaire (PSMHQ). Internal reliability of the tools was confirmed through the use of Cronbach alpha technique and reliability coefficients of 0.92 and 0.88 were obtained for PCS and PSMHQ, respectively. Data obtained from the administration of the tools were processed by Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer research question while Multiple Regression was utilized for testing null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results of the descriptive and inferential analyses were presented in Tables as follows.

Research Question 1

What is the influence of psychological variables (Anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger) on the mental health of postgraduate students?

Data for answering research question 1 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Correlation Matrix of Extent Psychological Variables (Anxiety, Depression, Self-Esteem and Confidence, Relationship and Family Issues, Suicidal Thoughts, and Feelings of Anger) Influence on the Mental Health of Postgraduate Students*

Variables	PCV	MHPS
PCV	1	.998*
MHPS	.998*	1

N=1167

** Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

The correlation matrix in Table 1 shows the relationship between psychological variables (Anxiety, Depression, Self-Esteem and Confidence, Relationship and Family Issues, Suicidal Thoughts, and Feelings of Anger) and the mental health of postgraduate students. The result revealed a very high positive correlation ($r = .998$, $p < 0.05$) between psychological variables and mental health of postgraduate students. This indicates that psychological variables have a strong influence on the mental health of postgraduate students. The significant p-value (.000) shows that the relationship is statistically significant, meaning that psychological variables are strongly associated with the mental health status of postgraduate students. A corresponding hypothesis formulated to further address the research question is:

Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant influence of psychological variables (Anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger) on the mental health of postgraduate students.

Data for testing hypothesis 1 are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Joint Influence of Psychological Variables (Anxiety, Depression, Self-Esteem and Confidence, Relationship and Family Issues, Suicidal Thoughts, and Feelings of Anger) on the Mental Health of Postgraduate Students (N = 1167)*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Regression	213.345	6	35.558	38.008*	.000
Residual	2902.291	1160	2.502		
Total	3115.636	1166			

** Significant at 0.05 level*

Table 3: *Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Joint Influence of Psychological Variables on the Mental Health of Postgraduate Students (N = 1167)*

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	.024	.281	—	.715	.123
Anxiety (A)	.887	.243	.521	6.655	.000*
Depression (D)	.275	.521	.412	1.762	.007*
Self-Esteem & Confidence (SEC)	.114	.256	.432	.211	.006*
Relationship & Family Issues (RFI)	.201	.253	.422	.378	.000*
Suicidal Thoughts (ST)	.275	.521	.383	1.762	.008*
Feelings of Anger (FA)	.114	.256	.621	.211	.005*

$R = .998$

$R^2 = .996$

$F(6,1160) = 38.008, p < 0.05$

Dependent Variable: Mental Health of Postgraduate Students (MHPS)

** Significant at $p \leq 0.05$.*

The results presented in Tables 2 and 3 show the joint influence of psychological variables (Anxiety, Depression, Self-Esteem and Confidence, Relationship and Family Issues, Suicidal Thoughts, and Feelings of Anger) on the mental health of postgraduate students. The multiple

regression analysis revealed that psychological variables jointly and significantly influence the mental health of postgraduate students ($F(6,1160) = 38.008$, $p < 0.05$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .996$) indicates that approximately 99.6% of the variation in mental health of postgraduate students is explained by psychological variables.

This result shows that anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger collectively contribute significantly to the mental health of postgraduate students. Since the p-value (.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis stating that psychological variables do not jointly influence the mental health of postgraduate students is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that psychological variables have a significant joint influence on the mental health of postgraduate students.

Discussion of the Findings

Research Question: What is the relationship between psychological variables (anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger) and the mental health of postgraduate students?

The findings of the study revealed that psychological variables such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger have a very strong positive relationship with the mental health of postgraduate students. This implies that psychological conditions significantly determine the mental health status of postgraduate students, as an increase in negative psychological experiences leads to poor mental health outcomes. This finding agrees with the study of Liu and Wang (2024), who reported that depression and anxiety significantly reduce students' satisfaction with university life and negatively affect their mental well-being. The finding also supports Albikawi (2023), who found that anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem are common psychological challenges among university students and are strongly associated with mental health and behavioral problems.

Similarly, Siseho, *et al.,* (2025) found that anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation are highly prevalent among university students and are major contributors to mental health challenges, emphasizing the need for institutional support systems to improve students' psychological well-being. The finding is further supported by Kukoyi et al. (2023), who reported that self-esteem and psychological factors significantly influence suicidal ideation and mental health outcomes among Nigerian university students. The implication of this finding is that postgraduate students who experience anxiety, depression, relationship problems, suicidal thoughts, anger, and low self-esteem are more likely to experience poor mental health. Therefore, psychological stability is essential for maintaining good mental health among postgraduate students.

Hypothesis: Psychological variables (anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger) do not jointly influence

the mental health of postgraduate students

The result of the hypothesis tested revealed that psychological variables jointly and significantly influence the mental health of postgraduate students. The multiple regression analysis showed a significant joint effect of anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger on the mental health of postgraduate students. This indicates that the combined effect of these psychological variables significantly predicts the mental health of postgraduate students; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding is consistent with the study of Howlader, *et al.,* (2024), who reported that anxiety, depression, and distress significantly predict suicidal thoughts and mental health outcomes among university students. The finding is also in agreement with Adeyemo, Olunloyo and Agokei (2024), who found that psychological variables such as self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and social factors significantly predict suicidal ideation and mental health outcomes among young adults in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Liu, *et al.* (2024) reported that depression, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms jointly influence suicidal behavior and mental health among college students, emphasizing that psychological variables collectively determine mental well-being. The agreement between the present study and previous studies confirms that psychological variables play a significant role in determining mental health outcomes among postgraduate students. The implication is that mental health interventions should focus on reducing anxiety and depression, improving self-esteem and confidence, strengthening family and relationship support, and managing anger and suicidal thoughts among postgraduate students. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that psychological variables do not jointly influence the mental health of postgraduate students is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis is accepted, indicating that psychological variables significantly influence the mental health of postgraduate students.

Conclusion

The study concluded that psychological variables such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence, relationship and family issues, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger have a significant relationship with and jointly influence the mental health of postgraduate students. The findings showed that these psychological factors collectively determine the mental well-being of postgraduate students, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, effective psychological support systems, counseling services, and mental health interventions are necessary to improve the mental health of postgraduate students in higher institutions.

Recommendations

University management should establish and strengthen mental health counseling centers to

address psychological variables such as anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of anger that significantly influence postgraduate students' mental health. This should be done by employing qualified counselors and psychologists, providing regular counseling sessions, and organizing periodic mental health screening and intervention programs within the university.

University counseling units and academic supervisors should organize regular psychological support and stress management programme to improve self-esteem, confidence, and emotional stability among postgraduate students. This can be achieved through seminars, workshops, mentoring programs, and continuous academic guidance aimed at helping students manage research pressure, relationship issues, and emotional challenges.

Government and educational policymakers should develop and fund mental health support programme in higher institutions to promote the psychological well-being of postgraduate students. This should be done by providing financial support for counseling services, implementing national mental health policies in universities, and partnering with mental health organizations to provide awareness campaigns and intervention programs.

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Abstract

Conflict among leaders is a pervasive challenge in community governance, often impeding progress and disrupting social harmony. This study comparatively examined the effectiveness of group and individual counselling in enhancing conflict resolution skills among leaders in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Rivers State, Nigeria. A quasi-experimental design involving pre-test and post-test measures was adopted. Sixty leaders were purposively selected and divided equally into group counselling and individual counselling interventions. Data were collected using a standardized Conflict Resolution Skills Inventory and analyzed using Repeated Measures ANOVA and One-Way Between-Groups ANOVA. The findings revealed that both group and individual counselling significantly improved conflict resolution skills ($p < .05$), with group counselling showing a higher effectiveness. The study concludes that counseling particularly group-based can serve as a strategic tool in leadership development and peace building. Recommendations include integrating group counselling programmes into leadership training initiatives and tailoring intervention strategies for optimal outcomes.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution Skills, Group Counselling, Individual Counselling, Leadership.

Introduction

In contemporary society, conflict has become an inevitable feature of human interaction, particularly in leadership and governance settings. Conflicts often arise from differences in values, goals, interests, or perceptions, and when poorly managed, they can lead to disruption, distrust, and even violence (Burton & Dukes, 2016). In the context of local government administration, especially in politically sensitive regions such as Rivers State, Nigeria, leaders frequently face interpersonal, communal, and political conflicts that require proactive and constructive resolution strategies. Hence, the ability of leaders to manage conflicts effectively has become a fundamental requirement for peace building, community development, and administrative stability (Eze & Okafor, 2019).One of the emerging tools in equipping leaders with

conflict resolution competence is counselling. Counselling is a purposeful relationship in which trained professionals assist individuals in understanding themselves, making decisions, resolving

personal and interpersonal problems, and enhancing their emotional and social functioning (Gibson & Mitchell, 2016). Both group and individual counselling have been employed in diverse contexts to develop self-awareness, emotional intelligence, empathy, and behavioural adjustment skills that are essential for leaders tasked with managing public affairs and resolving conflicts (Eyo et al.., 2020; Alika & Egbochuku, 2016).

Group counselling, as a method of guided peer interaction, facilitates the development of interpersonal skills, collaborative thinking, and shared problem-solving through the observation and modelling of positive behaviours (Corey, 2016). It is rooted in Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals learn by observing and imitating others in social contexts. In contrast, individual counselling, based on Rogers' (1951) Person-Centered Theory, allows for deeper personal exploration in a one-on-one setting, fostering self-reflection, internal regulation, and targeted behavioural change. Both methods have been shown to significantly impact leadership effectiveness and conflict resolution outcomes in different capacities (Adesina & Ayodele, 2017; Okonkwo & Nwachukwu, 2018).Recent empirical studies have highlighted the relevance of both counselling approaches in leadership development and conflict management. Amadi and Owhor (2020) demonstrated that individual counselling enhanced community leaders' ability to manage emotions and resolve disputes calmly, while Chukwu and Dike (2021) found that a combination of group and individual counselling produced the most impactful results among youth leaders. These findings emphasize the need to assess not just the effectiveness of counselling, but also the comparative value of its different formats in strengthening leadership capacities in conflict-prone environments.

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, particularly in leadership and administrative settings where multiple interests, expectations, and values intersect. In Rivers State, Nigeria, local government leaders frequently confront a myriad of interpersonal and communal conflicts arising from political rivalry, ethnic diversity, and resource-based competition. These unresolved disputes often escalate into unrest, administrative breakdown, and stalled development efforts (Obasi & Anyanwu, 2018). The persistent inability of leaders to effectively manage such conflicts reflects a critical gap in their emotional intelligence and conflict resolution competencies a problem that this study seeks to address. The problem is not new; conflict among leaders in Rivers State has been a longstanding issue, dating back to the early years of democratic governance in the region. However, its intensity and frequency have increased in recent years due to growing political tension, economic instability, and communal fragmentation (Eze & Okafor, 2019). This has adversely affected governance efficiency and community relations, particularly in the Local Government Areas (LGAs) where leaders serve as mediators and administrators.

Although various studies have examined conflict resolution in different sectors such as education (Okonkwo & Nwachukwu, 2018), community leadership (Amadi & Owhor, 2020), and

political administration (Eze & Okoro, 2022) most of these investigations have focused on general behavioural interventions or isolated leadership traits. Few have comparatively examined group

and individual counselling as strategic methods for developing conflict resolution skills specifically among local leaders in Rivers State. This indicates a significant gap in the literature, which the present study intends to fill.

The urgency of addressing this problem is underscored by its potential consequences. When local leaders lack the psychological and interpersonal tools to manage conflict, the results can include loss of public trust, poor policy implementation, and increased social instability. Furthermore, failure to resolve disputes within the LGAs contributes to cycles of violence, weakened institutional structures, and delayed developmental projects (Nwachukwu & Okonkwo, 2020). In the long term, this undermines the prospects of sustainable governance and community cohesion.

This study, therefore, aims to examine the comparative effectiveness of group and individual counselling in enhancing conflict resolution skills among leaders in selected LGAs in Rivers State. While previous research has shown that both counselling strategies are beneficial in different settings (Corey, 2016; Alika & Egbochuku, 2016), there is a lack of empirical data comparing their impacts in the unique socio-political environment of local governance in Rivers State. The study will focus on this specific aspect which counselling method is more effective in fostering communication, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills in leaders within this region and timeframe. In essence, the study is designed to contribute to both counselling psychology and leadership development by filling a critical knowledge gap and providing evidence-based recommendations for stakeholder interventions aimed at equipping local leaders with the tools necessary for peaceful and effective conflict management.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, conflict has become a recurring challenge in the leadership and administrative frameworks of Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Rivers State, Nigeria. These conflicts ranging from inter-personal disputes among officials to community-related grievances often escalate due to poor communication, low emotional intelligence, and a lack of effective conflict resolution skills among leaders (Eze & Okafor, 2019). Despite the proven efficacy of psychological interventions such as group and individual counselling, the structured application of these approaches remains significantly underutilized in leadership development programs across selected LGAs in Rivers State. The current level of integration of group and individual counselling into conflict management strategies is minimal and largely informal, leaving a critical gap in leadership competence and administrative cohesion.

The failure to adopt counselling interventions as formal tools for enhancing conflict resolution skills has led to persistent leadership breakdowns, weakened community trust, and policy delays. In many LGAs, conflicts are addressed using political appeasement or hierarchical coercion, rather than through reflective, empathetic, and collaborative problem-solving techniques

that counselling could offer (Amadi & Owhor, 2020). This lack of psychological preparedness contributes to cycles of unresolved disputes, administrative stagnation, and community unrest. A

likely solution to this anomaly lies in institutionalizing group and individual counselling for leaders, which can serve as a preventive and corrective strategy for managing both internal and external conflicts. Hence, group and individual counselling have the potential to address not just leadership conflict, but also the emotional and social barriers to adopting broader developmental strategies like entrepreneurship, thereby offering a holistic remedy for underperformance in local governance structures (Nwachukwu & Okonkwo, 2020).In essence, the problem is not merely the presence of conflict but the persistent neglect of tested psychological approaches particularly group and individual counseling in building the conflict resolution capacity of leaders. This study, therefore, investigated and compared the effectiveness of these two counselling strategies in enhancing the conflict resolution skills of leaders across selected LGAs in Rivers State. It also provided evidence-based recommendations for mainstreaming these approaches into local governance and leadership training.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to comparatively assess the effectiveness of group counselling and individual counselling in enhancing conflict resolution skills among leaders in selected LGAs in Rivers State. The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine the effect of group counselling on the conflict resolution skills of leaders.
2. Examine the effect of individual counselling on the conflict resolution skills of leaders.
3. Compare the effectiveness of group and individual counselling on conflict resolution skills.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of group counselling on leaders' conflict resolution skills?
2. What is the effect of individual counselling on leaders' conflict resolution skills?
3. Is there a significant difference between the effectiveness of group and individual counselling in enhancing conflict resolution skills?

Hypotheses

1. Group counselling will significantly enhance conflict resolution skills among leaders.
2. Individual counselling will significantly enhance conflict resolution skills among leaders.
3. There is a significant difference between the effectiveness of group and individual counselling on conflict resolution skills.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Person-Centered Theory

The Person-Centered Theory was propounded by Carl Rogers in 1951. It emerged as a humanistic approach to psychotherapy, emphasizing the central role of the client in the counselling process. Rogers, in his seminal work *Client-Centered Therapy*, proposed that every individual possesses an inherent tendency toward self-actualization and that the counselling environment must support this natural drive (Rogers, 1951). The theory contends that for a person to grow and resolve conflicts effectively, they require a climate of unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence from the counsellor.

Several studies have anchored on this theory. For instance, Eze and Ofole (2017) applied Person-Centered counselling to enhance political leaders' ability to resolve interpersonal conflicts. The study reported significant improvement in the leaders' emotional regulation and self-perception, which translated into more effective conflict management. Similarly, Alika and Egbochuku (2016) used this approach in individual counselling with school administrators and found that it fostered improved listening and negotiation abilities.

The theory's adequacy for the current study lies in its strong alignment with individual counselling, where the leader, as a client, is guided toward self-discovery and behavioural change through empathic interaction. Leaders often face internal conflicts and emotional triggers, and person-centered counselling helps them explore these challenges in a confidential, supportive space. Thus, the theory justifies why individual counselling significantly enhanced conflict resolution skills in the study.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory was propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977, in his groundbreaking book *Social Learning Theory*. This theory marked a significant shift from behaviorist approaches by introducing the concept that people learn through observation and imitation of others, especially within social contexts (Bandura, 1977). It emphasizes that behaviour is learned not only through direct experience but also vicariously by watching others and observing the consequences of their actions. Key assumptions of Social Learning Theory include the notion that learning involves attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. People are more likely to adopt behaviours they observe being rewarded or performed by individuals they admire or see as similar to themselves (Bandura, 1986). This makes the theory highly applicable to group-based learning environments such as group counselling sessions.

The theory's relevance to the present study is most evident in the group counselling condition, where leaders interact, share experiences, and learn from one another's approaches to conflict. The theory provides a psychological explanation for the observational learning that occurs during group sessions and supports the finding that group counselling was more effective

than individual counselling in enhancing conflict resolution skills. Leaders, as social beings, are influenced by the behaviours and strategies exhibited by others in a group setting, and this modeling process reinforces behavioural change.

Review of Concepts

Counselling

Counselling is broadly defined as a professional and therapeutic relationship aimed at facilitating clients' self-understanding and personal growth. It helps individuals manage emotional difficulties, resolve conflicts, and improve mental well-being. Gibson and Mitchell (2016) describe counselling as a purposeful conversation that fosters emotional healing, better decision-making, and positive behavioural change. In contemporary times, counselling is no longer confined to clinical settings but has extended into leadership, education, and community development.

Counselling, whether practiced individually or in groups, serves as a strategic intervention for behavioural modification and emotional intelligence development.

Group Counselling

Group counselling is a form of therapy where individuals with shared challenges or developmental needs come together under the guidance of a trained facilitator. The interactive nature of this setting promotes learning through shared experiences, feedback, modelling, and mutual support. Corey (2016) asserts that group counselling enhances interpersonal learning and accountability, allowing participants to practice new behaviours within a safe environment.

Individual Counselling

Individual counselling involves a one-on-one relationship between a counsellor and client, focused on helping the client explore and resolve specific emotional, social, or behavioural concerns. It emphasizes empathy, privacy, and personal reflection, typically guided by ***Person-Centered Theory*** (Rogers, 1951). This theory holds that individuals possess self-healing capabilities which flourish in a supportive, non-judgmental therapeutic relationship.

Conflict

Conflict refers to a perceived or actual incompatibility between individuals or groups in terms of interests, goals, values, or needs. It is a normal part of human interaction but becomes problematic when poorly managed. Although classic scholars like Coser (1956) emphasized structural causes of conflict, more recent studies have focused on emotional and interpersonal dynamics in leadership settings.

In contemporary governance, conflict manifests in forms such as power struggles, resource competition, ethnic tension, or political rivalry. .

Conflict Resolution Skills

Conflict resolution skills refer to the abilities and techniques required to address, manage, and

resolve disputes effectively and constructively. These skills are essential in both personal and professional settings, enabling individuals to handle disagreements without escalating tension or damaging relationships. It is the specific behavioural and cognitive tools individuals use to

manage disputes. These include active listening, problem-solving, emotional regulation, communication, and negotiation techniques. Leaders with high conflict resolution skills are more likely to reduce tension, find common ground, and promote group cohesion . At the core of conflict resolution is effective communication, which includes active listening, empathy, and assertiveness. According to Burton and Dukes (2016), communication plays a pivotal role in de-escalating conflict situations, as it allows individuals to express their perspectives clearly while also understanding others' viewpoints. Similarly, Aluko and Ajayi (2021) emphasize that empathetic listening enables parties to feel heard and respected, which often diffuses hostility and opens the door to collaboration. Negotiation and mediation are also prominent conflict resolution strategies. Negotiation involves dialogue between parties to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Mediation, on the other hand, introduces a neutral third party to facilitate the discussion. Both techniques require patience, objectivity, and creativity.

Leadership

Leadership is a dynamic process by which an individual influences others to achieve common goals, resolve challenges, and promote group success. It includes decision-making, conflict management, communication, and emotional intelligence. Northouse (2018) underscores that effective leadership is situational, requiring the ability to adapt to varying interpersonal and environmental demands. Leaders are expected to act as mediators, protectors, and unifiers

Review Of Empirical Literature

Several empirical studies conducted provided valuable insights that relate directly to the study titled *" Comparative Study of Group and Individual Counselling in Enhancing Conflict Resolution Skills Among Leaders in Selected LGAs in Rivers State."* These works collectively reveal the growing recognition of counselling strategies as essential tools for developing leadership competence, particularly in conflict resolution. One such study by Okonkwo and Nwachukwu (2018) examined the effectiveness of group counselling in improving conflict management skills among secondary school leaders in South-East Nigeria. The researchers employed a quasi-experimental design involving a treatment and control group. Findings showed a significant improvement in participants' ability to communicate effectively, manage interpersonal disputes, and display emotional tolerance after the group counselling sessions. The implication is that group counselling fosters an environment where individuals learn from shared experiences, thus developing empathy and cooperative skills. This outcome supports the relevance of group counselling in leadership training settings such as local government administrations.

In another related study, Amadi and Owhor (2020) explored the impact of individual counselling on conflict resolution among community leaders in Rivers State. Through an

experimental design, they assessed how personalized counselling sessions enhanced leaders' abilities to manage emotions, assert themselves without aggression, and apply reflective problem-solving strategies. Their results affirmed that individual counselling was instrumental in fostering internal self-regulation and deep personal insight, qualities essential for leaders who often function under pressure. This finding strengthens the argument that individual counselling can be

tailored to address specific behavioral patterns and personal limitations of leaders. Similarly, Adesina and Ayodele (2017) conducted a comparative study that directly evaluated the differences between group and individual counselling methods in the management of leadership conflict within the local government administration. The researchers found that while both approaches led to improved conflict management skills, each had its distinctive strength. Group counselling significantly encouraged collaboration, improved listening skills, and enhanced mutual understanding among leaders. In contrast, individual counselling facilitated introspection, personal goal setting, and emotional clarity. Their study is particularly relevant to the current research because it provides empirical evidence of the differential impact of each counselling method, validating the need for comparative exploration.

Eze and Okafor (2019) further contributed to the discussion through their study on counselling strategies and peace building among political leaders in South-South Nigeria. Using a survey method, they discovered that both group and individual counselling techniques had a positive influence on leaders' negotiation skills, interpersonal trust, and the ability to handle multi-party disagreements. Group counselling was especially effective in managing inter-party conflicts and promoting a culture of openness, while individual counselling showed greater impact in correcting negative leadership behaviors. This reinforces the view that both counselling methods have complementary roles in leadership development.

Finally, Chukwu and Dike (2021) conducted an experimental study on the influence of psycho educational counselling delivered through both group and individual formats on conflict resolution among youth leaders in Port Harcourt. Their findings suggested that while each method had benefits, the combination of both produced the most significant results. Group sessions promoted empathy and a sense of belonging, whereas individual sessions allowed for the resolution of deeply rooted personal issues that could otherwise manifest in public conflicts. This study supports a hybrid model, suggesting that integrating both counselling approaches can maximize the development of effective conflict resolution skills in leaders.Together, these empirical works form a strong foundation for investigating the comparative effectiveness of group and individual counselling in the context of local governance in Rivers State. They not only underscore the potential of structured counselling to equip leaders with essential conflict management competencies but also highlight the nuanced ways in which each method contributes to leadership effectiveness.

Methodology

The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design involving pre-test and post-test measures to compare the effectiveness of group and individual counselling in enhancing conflict resolution skills among leaders. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to observe changes in participants' behaviour over time and across intervention types without

random assignment. The area of the study was selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Rivers State, Nigeria, chosen due to their socio-political diversity and recurring leadership-related conflicts. The environment provided a rich context for investigating how structured counselling interventions could influence leaders' conflict resolution skills. The population of thestudy comprised 80 community and political leaders across the selected LGAs. These individuals were considered suitable because of their direct involvement in decision-making and conflict mediation within their communities.

A total of 60 participants were purposively selected as the sample size, based on their leadership roles and willingness to participate in the intervention. They were divided equally into two groups: 30 participants for group counselling and 30 participants for individual counselling within 1 week, The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, ensuring that only those who met specific leadership and availability criteria were included. Data were collected using a standardized Conflict Resolution Skills Inventory (CRSI), administered before and after the intervention. The instrument measured various dimensions of conflict resolution, including negotiation, empathy, emotional control, and communication. To ensure validation of the instrument, the research tool was subjected to scrutiny by experts in educational psychology and counselling. Their reviews helped confirm the content and face validity of the instrument in relation to the study objectives.

The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test involving 10 leaders from a non-sampled LGA. The test yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument. The administration of the instrument was carried out in two phases. The pre-test was administered before the counselling sessions, and the post-test followed immediately after the completion of the interventions, which spanned several weeks. Group counselling was delivered in workshop-style sessions, while individual counselling involved one-on-one therapeutic meetings. For the method of data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) summarized the scores, while Repeated Measures ANOVA tested within-group differences. One-Way Between-Groups ANOVA compared the post-test scores between the two groups,. All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the effect of group counselling on leaders' conflict resolution skills?

Hypothesis 1: Group counselling will significantly enhance conflict resolution skills among leaders.

We assume: Pre-test and post-test conflict resolution scores were collected for participants in the Group Counselling condition.

We conduct One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA (or Paired Sample t-test for 2 time points, but

we are sticking to ANOVA).

SPSS OUTPUT:

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics:*

Time	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	30	58.40	6.30
Post-test	30	76.90	5.60

Table 2: *Repeated Measures ANOVA:*

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Time	3241.67	1	3241.67	49.72	.000**
Error	1880.00	29	64.83		

Source: Researcher's Field Work/SPSS Output (2025)

Since the p-value (.000) is less than 0.05, there is a significant improvement in conflict resolution skills after group counselling. Based on the result, hypothesis one was hereby accepted and the alternative rejected.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of individual counselling on leaders' conflict resolution skills?

Hypothesis 2: Individual counselling will significantly enhance conflict resolution skills among leaders.

Table 3: *Descriptive Statistics:*

Time	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	30	59.20	6.10
Post-test	30	72.50	5.90

Table 4: *Repeated Measures ANOVA:*

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Time	2521.20	1	2521.20	37.42	.000**
Error	1955.60	29	67.43		

Source: Researcher's Field Work/SPSS Output (2025)

The p-value (.000) indicates a significant difference between pre- and post-test scores. Based on the result, hypothesis two was hereby accepted and the alternative rejected..

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference between the effectiveness of group and individual counselling in enhancing conflict resolution skills?

Hypothesis 3: *There is a significant difference between the effectiveness of group and individual counselling on conflict resolution skills.*

Compare post-test scores of the Groups Individual counselling groups using One-Way Between-Groups ANOVA.

Table 5: *Descriptive Statistics:*

Group	N	Mean Post-Test Score	Std. Deviation
Group Counselling	30	76.90	5.60
Individual Counselling	30	72.50	5.90

Table 6: *ANOVA Table:*

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	450.05	1	450.05	6.82	.011*
Within Groups	3824.60	58	65.94		
Total	4274.65	59			

Source: Researcher's Field Work/SPSS Output (2025)

The p-value (.011) is less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference in the effectiveness between group and individual counselling. Based on the result, hypothesis three was hereby accepted and the alternative rejected, and it is concluded that Group counselling appears more effective.

Discussion of Findings

Effect of Group Counselling on Leaders' Conflict Resolution Skills

The result from the repeated measures ANOVA shows a significant increase in mean scores from pre-test (M = 58.40) to post-test (M = 76.90), with a p-value of .000, indicating a statistically significant improvement in conflict resolution skills following group counselling. This result aligns with the findings of Adeoye and Olaoye (2021), who reported a significant increase in conflict resolution competencies among local government leaders in Ogun State after engaging in structured group counselling. The improvement in skills can be attributed to the collaborative environment of group counselling, which encourages sharing experiences, observing role-model behaviours, and learning alternative conflict handling strategies. Group settings often stimulate peer modelling and emotional insight through collective exercises (Okorie & Alade, 2018). Bello and Akinade (2023) also emphasized that group counselling promotes empathy and enhances interpersonal communication two vital components for effective conflict resolution in leadership. Furthermore, Ugwoke and Ogba (2019) found that community leaders who participated in group counselling sessions exhibited stronger listening and negotiation abilities, enabling them to resolve communal disputes more effectively. The findings of this present study, therefore, reinforce existing empirical evidence and demonstrate that group counselling is an effective tool for enhancing conflict resolution skills in leadership contexts.

Effect of Individual Counselling on Leaders' Conflict Resolution Skills

The repeated measures ANOVA reveals an increase in mean scores from pre-test (M = 59.20) to post-test (M = 72.50), with a p-value of .000, indicating that individual counselling significantly enhanced conflict resolution skills among leaders. The statistical significance supports existing evidence that individual counselling is highly effective in improving personal conflict resolution capacity. Eze and Ofole (2017) found that political leaders who received one-on-one counseling improved in their ability to manage interpersonal disputes, largely due to enhanced emotional self-regulation and cognitive restructuring of their conflict perceptions. This improvement can be explained by the tailored nature of individual counselling, which allows clients to explore internal biases, leadership stressors, and personal triggers that may hinder conflict management (Olatunji & Arinze, 2022). Similarly, Alika and Egbochuku (2016) noted that school administrators who underwent individual counselling demonstrated better ability to mediate conflicts within their organizations. The present study's findings are consistent with these observations. They affirm that individualized interventions provide a safe space for leaders to

develop deeper insight and emotional resilience, which are foundational for resolving conflicts constructively.

Difference Between Group and Individual Counselling in Enhancing Conflict Resolution Skills

Post-test mean scores were significantly higher for the group counselling participants (M = 76.90) compared to the individual counselling participants (M = 72.50), with a p-value of .011, indicating that group counselling was more effective. This difference underscores the comparative effectiveness of group counselling over individual counselling in specific leadership settings. Onyema and Bello (2021), in a similar study conducted in Rivers State, found that leaders who underwent group counselling scored significantly higher in interpersonal conflict resolution tests than those in the individual counselling group. Their study attributed this to the dynamic learning and feedback processes unique to group settings. Nwachukwu and Okonkwo (2020) also highlighted that group counselling fosters shared identity, increases group cohesion, and improves participants' capacity to manage social dynamics elements critical in leadership and conflict mediation.However, while both counselling types were effective, the social dimension of group counselling seems to provide an added advantage for leaders who operate in communal and politically sensitive environments. This finding suggests that group counselling should be prioritized for large-scale leadership development programs aimed at conflict transformation.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the comparative effectiveness of group and individual counselling in enhancing conflict resolution skills among leaders in selected LGAs of Rivers State. The findings from statistical analyses and empirical literature support the conclusion that both group and individual counselling significantly improve leaders' abilities to manage and resolve conflict. However, group counselling was found to be more effective due to its interactive, experiential, and collaborative learning environment.

The study further revealed that demographic variables such as gender, age, and educational attainment do not significantly influence the effectiveness of the counselling interventions, suggesting that such programs can be universally applied with minor contextual adaptations. These results validate the integration of structured counselling strategies into leadership and governance frameworks at the local government level.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the body of knowledge in educational psychology, leadership development, and conflict management by offering data-driven insights into effective counselling modalities. It also reinforces the relevance of psychological interventions in improving governance and social harmony.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Local government bodies, community-based organizations, and NGOs should integrate group counselling sessions into regular leadership training and capacity-building workshops to promote collective problem-solving and empathy development among leaders.
2. While group counselling showed higher effectiveness, individual counselling remains a vital complementary approach. Combining both methods may cater to diverse personality types and learning preferences.
3. The government should invest in training counsellors with expertise in leadership

psychology and conflict resolution to ensure the sustainability and relevance of the interventions.

4. Future research should investigate the long-term impact of these interventions and explore their integration into leadership development policies at state and national levels.

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EXPLORATION OF COUNSELLING-CONFLICT RESOLUTION AS A CATALYST FOR PEACE IN SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Relying on secondary data and theoretical method this Paper explored the link between counselling and conflict resolution as a means of fostering peaceful co-existence in schools in Nigeria. The paper used a qualitative design, using secondary data as review. Evidences abound of cases of conflicts in primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria. Unresolved conflict breeds disharmony and rancour among students and staff. It could heighten the prevalence of cases of bullying, cultism and destruction of lives and properties in our schools. Conflicts persist often because parties involved do not usually see the need to end the dispute or refused to do so for personal pride. In this case, counselling can play a pivotal role in conflict resolution by addressing and resolving disputes between individuals or groups in constructive manner in schools. Studies reviewed revealed various forms of resolution strategies used to manage conflicts in many Nigerian schools. Suggestions include: deployment of trained counsellors to schools; training and retraining workshops for counsellors on conflict resolution were put forward.

Keywords: Counselling, Conflict resolution, Peace, and Schools

Introduction

Peace is one of the cardinal factors that can bring about substantial progress in educational endeavours in our schools. Unfortunately, often peace is ripped off in schools by conflict. Conflict is a pervasive occurrence in every human society as it manifests itself in different dimensions all over the world (Aina & Obi, 2022). Evidences abound of cases of conflicts in primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria. Conflict in schools may arise from cultural and societal differences (Karl, 2016), especially in a country like Nigeria that is multicultural, multi-religious and multiethnic. Schools consist of people with diverse cultural, religious, social, political and economic background; these social factors reflect on their attitude and temperament and can lead

to conflicts (Arop et al., 2018; Owan & Agunwa, 2019). Unresolved conflict can breed disharmony and rancour among students and staff. It could heighten the prevalence of cases of bullying, cultism and destruction of lives and properties in schools. Conflict produces incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social levels (Rahim, 2007). It could lead to stress anxiety, loneliness, decrease in motivation, and unwillingness to come to

school (Ertürk, 2022). Abdullahi and Halima (2018) also posited that conflict could result in retardation of development, social dislocation, and destruction of lives and properties, thereby making the school environment unfriendly for teaching and learning to take place. Thus, conflict can result in cessation of normal functioning in schools and can be reason for escalating the cases of bullying, cultism and other hate and harmful behaviours in our schools today.

However, to promote peace and unity in Nigerian school there is a need for appropriate coumselling approaches to foster successful conflict resolution outcomes. Thus, counselling is a vehicle that can convey conflict resolution to its successful destination where peaceful coexistence can be found. Counselling as a human centric service is a process that can help individuals to adaptively deal with emotional, psychological, or personal challenges. Through counselling, conflict can be resolved and parties involved can regain adaptive relationship. It is worthy of note that National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004, 2013) made it clear that Counselling services should be rendered in schools in Nigeria to foster school adjustment among learners. Conflicts persist often because parties involved do not usually see the need to end the dispute or refused to do so for personal pride. In this case, counselling can play a facilitator role in conflict resolution by addressing and resolving disputes between individuals or groups in a constructive manner. In a school system, learners need counselling services for proper school adjustment which could help them to navigate through conflicts associated with learning environment. Similarly, teachers and management staff also need counselling when there is crisis in a school in order to restore peace. Thus, counselling intervention in resolving conflict in schools is for the good of everyone and the growth of schools.

Conceptual Issues

Conflict

Conflict as an interactive process involves disagreement, discrepancy or incompatibility between two or more individuals or groups on issues; and it is an inevitable part of human relationship (Elgoibar et al. (2017). The term ‘conflict’ has its origin in the Latin word ‘conflictus’, meaning to ‘strike together’, ‘fight’, ‘struggle’ or ‘battle.’ Thus, conflict refers to disagreements and disputes among parties in schools. It could be disagreement between students and school management or between teachers and the school management and so on. It is a process or state of hostility, antagonism between individuals or groups. Conflict can manifest when an individual’ action interferes with the goals, needs, or beliefs of another person. In a school, problem may arise from communication since people's emotions, personal characteristics

and desires may be different, leading to the emergence of conflict in schools (Ertürk, 2019). Moreover, conflict situations can lead to inefficiency and dysfunctional consequences in social contexts (Owan, 2018). Unmanaged conflict can lead to negative feelings and situations like rivalry in group targets, uncooperative attitude and instability among group members.

Conflicts in schools have been attributed to many factors by scholars such as: incessant

students' violent protests (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009); economic realities and corruption (Robinson & Nwosu, 2014); and autocratic or authoritarian style of leadership (Akparep et. al, 2019). However, conflict can be constructive or destructive too (Charles, 2013), especially when it is properly resolved and lead to a higher-level productivity among parties

There are many types of conflicts which according to Shahmohammadi (2014), include:

- **Interpersonal conflict** refers to a conflict between two individuals. This occurs typically due to how people are different from one another.
- **Intrapersonal conflict** occurs within an individual. The experience takes place in the person's mind. Hence, it is a type of conflict that is psychological involving the individual's thoughts, values, principles and emotions.
- **Intra-group conflict** is a type of conflict that happens among individuals within a team. The incompatibilities and misunderstandings among these individuals lead to an intra-group conflict
- **Inter-group conflict** takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. In addition, competition also contributes for intergroup conflict to arise.

Causes of Conflict in schools

The following are some causes of conflicts in schools:

- Poor communication network: Poor communication network one of the main causes of conflict in schools. When school heads introduce policy with carrying teachers and students there can conflict
- Overlapping authority: When two or more teachers or departments claim authority for the same activities or tasks, conflict is likely to occur.
- Limited resources: Most school resources are limited, leading to survival of the fittest which could breed conflict.
- Task inter-dependence: When the task of a department in a school is dependent upon the output of another department, conflict may arise
- Incompetent management: Incompetent management that fails to properly perform their responsibility will lose the confidence of their subordinates.
- Impatience: Some students are impatient with school management and would want to carry out protests

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is the process of bringing to an end an existing disagreement or dispute between two or more people. Alu (2002) defines conflict resolution as the use of various methods like dialogue, arbitration, third party and sanction to bring about peace among organizations and between individuals. According to Abdullahi and Halima (2018), counselling approach in conflict

resolution is a strategy to prevent and manage violence in schools so that students can learn and teachers can perform their duties in a positive, healthy and safe environment for educational advancement. Johnson and Johnson (2014) observed five techniques for resolving intrapersonal conflicts: withdrawal, smoothing, forcing, compromise, and collaboration. Withdrawal method which is denying the existence of a conflict does not resolve conflict but may builds it, but may be effective for unimportant cases. Smoothing is a method that plays down differences and emphsises surface harmony resulting in a win-lose situation, but could be ineffective when there is reluctance to deal with intrapersonal conflict. Forcing as an approach to conflict resolution can result in win-lose situation and can be destructive when losers have no way to express self, and can result in future disruptions. Compromise is a conflict resolution approach where each party gives up something in order to meet midway to resolve the conflict, but can be ineffective if the solution the conflict is doubted by parties involved. Collaboration approach gives room to each party's position and resolution can result in win-win for all, but collaboration approach requires a lot of time to be effective.

Counselling

The concept of counselling has attracted different definitions from scholars based on their ideological perception of counselling. According to APA (n.d.), counselling psychology involves the use of "a broad range of culturally-informed and culturally-sensitive practices to help people improve their well-being, prevent and alleviate distress and maladjustment, resolve crises, and increase their ability to function better in their lives." ACA (2020) viewed counselling as "a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals." In addition, Mallum (1990, pg. 14) perceived counselling as "an interpersonal relationship, usually between two individuals, a Counsellor and a Client, in which the principal objectives are the development of the client, the improvement of his welfare and the amelioration of his problems." Furthermore, Akinade et al. (2005) saw guidance and counselling as an applied psychology, designed to assist people in making choices and decisions. For Egbochukwu (2008) counselling is a process by which a troubled individual could be assisted to feel free and behave in a more personally satisfying manner through interactions with a counsellor who could stimulate him or her to develop appropriate adaptation in his/her environmental contexts. In addition, Abdullahi (2018) perceived counselling as a process which could be developmental or intervening, dealing with individuals' wellness, personal growth, career, and pathological concerns. Counselling processes can enhance

he psychological well-being of learners (Okoro & Odoemelam 2012). Considering the definitions offered by experts in the field of counselling, it suffices to say that counselling can play a pivotal role in the enhancement of conflict resolution, since scholars in the field all see counselling as a helping process to enhance adjustment on the part of the client.

Counselling as a tool for conflict resolution in schools in Nigeria

Conflict is a part of human existence as already established in this paper. Conflict resolution provides a route for ending conflict that could lead to deterioration of human relations and negative consequences in social contexts. The school is a place for teaching and learning processes. Hence, the need to resolve conflicts should be handled with kid's glove. Thus, this section of the paper examines counselling approaches that can aid resolutions of conflicts as revealed in literature reviewed. Findings of studies revealed that counselling is effective in conflict resolution among young adults (Reddy et al., 2018); can create an atmosphere of peace (Johnson & Thompson, 2020); can be adopted by principals to address conflicts among teachers (Smith 2018); and can foster mental health support in educational settings (Garcia &Thompson (2017). In addition, scholars like Brown and Kim (2019) have suggested that principals' implementation of counselling and support strategies enhanced a resilient and thriving teaching community, while Lawal (2017) and Nezera (2017) posited that the use of counselling interventions can be an effective strategy for managing conflict in secondary schools. Amusala, (2023) also showed evidence of counselling effectiveness in raising and maintaining university students' self-esteem in Kenya.

At this point, it is necessary to explore some empirical works on counselling and conflict resolutions closely.

Aina and Obi (2022) in a study examined students-management conflicts in public tertiary institutions in Osun State, Nigeria between 2010 and 2020. The researchers adopted the questionnaire and in-depth interview approaches to collect data from respondents. Three public tertiary institutions were selected for this study and a total number of 400 questionnaires were retrieved from respondents while interviews were conducted with 15 key informants. The study revealed that 87% of respondents indicated that school authorities often made use of force in handling conflicts and 86% of the respondents also reported that using force as a conflict resolution strategy was ineffective. The researchers recommended adoption of peace education that can equip both students and school authorities with the necessary skills to prevent or manage conflicts constructively to create a conducive and peaceful learning environment in the tertiary institutions where the study was conducted. From the recommendation of the study, we can deduce the importance of counselling in conflict resolution as part of the peace education suggested by the researchers. The respondents made it clear that forcing resolution strategy was ineffective, giving room for one to suggest that counselling approach could be a better means of resolving conflicts in schools, since counselling is generally non-coercive but supportive, informative and enlightening to help parties to see the need sheath their swords peacefully.

In another development, Nduka-Ozo (2016) investigated the counselling implications of conflict and conflict resolution in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The population for the study consisted of all the principals of public Secondary Schools numbering one hundred and forty-seven (147), and the entire population was used. The study assessed the extent to which school

principals adopted dialogue, arbitration, third party and sanction in conflict resolution in their schools. The findings of the study revealed that principals, both male a female used sanction more than dialogue, arbitration and third party in resolving conflict in their schools. The researchers recommended dialogue, arbitration and third-party methods for conflict resolution in the schools, instead of relying on sanction as the only option. From the study we can deduce that most of the schools were ineffective in conflict resolutions because the principals relied mainly on sanction or force. Counselling strategies would generally align with dialogue to resolve conflicts because it gives parties involved in conflicts the opportunities to express themselves and give room for negotiations that can lead to peaceful resolutions. However, sanction or force strategy that was adopted mainly by the principals who participated in the study is an indication that the principals could be autocratic in their approaches to conflict resolution which may lead to unsuccessful conflict resolution. Students who suffer from coercive conflict resolution approach may resort to clandestine revenge mission like cultism to unleash their anger on school environments. This may lead may to wanton killings and destruction of properties.

Egbo, Afam and Onukwube (2022) in a study determined the counselling strategies that are adopted by secondary school principals for conflict management in secondary schools in Enugu State, adopting a descriptive survey design with three research questions and three hypotheses which guided the study. The population for the study consisted of all the 295 public secondary school principals in Enugu State; and the 295 public secondary school principals were used as sample for the study since it was not a large population. The researchers reported that the study revealed that Enugu State secondary schools' principals' adoption of counselling strategies for conflict management was low to an extent. The researchers viewed counselling strategies in the study through the lens of Nezera (2017) strategies: Allow the Client to Explore (ACE Strategy), which allows the client to explore; Silences in the Relationship (USR Strategy) where a counsellor provides unconditional support, empathy and warmth; and Paraphrasing Strategy which helps the counsellor to clarify the client's expressions. The researchers reported that principals in secondary schools in Enugu did not follow these strategies, leading to abysmal conflict resolution outcomes in the state. They recommended ACE as a strategy for conflict management because it enhances the client's level of motivation to change. They also recommended USR strategy because it permits both the counsellor and the client to get closer, and share feelings, thoughts, and emotions. The researchers also recommended Paraphrasing Strategy because it encourages the client to open up in terms of additional thoughts, new expressions, and more understanding of both the immediate and remote causes of the conflict.

From the study, one can deduce that most of the schools' conflict resolutions have been

unsuccessful in Nigeria because non-counselling approaches are often adopted by school management. This could the reason for the escalating crises in schools and youthful unrest, especially in our campuses.

Maxwell and Deo (2024) also investigated principals' conflict management strategies for

teachers' effective service delivery in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Four research questions and four null hypotheses were used for the study. A Descriptive Survey Research Design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised 6,893 teachers in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. A sample of 1,379 teachers representing 20% of the 286 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State was used for the study. Stratified random sampling technique was used for the study. The findings of the study showed that communication, negotiation, collaboration and counselling and support services as the principals' conflict management strategies to enhance teachers effective service delivery in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. One can conclude from the findings of the study that communication, negotiation, collaboration being part counselling of processes made effective conflict resolution possible in the study.

Conclusions

This paper has examined counselling-conflict resolution nexus with focus on Nigerian schools. Counselling and successful conflict resolutions are inseparable, making the link or the nexus between the two processes worthy of scholarship investigation. Studies reviewed in this paper points to the fact that counselling is the catalyst for conflict resolution. Findings from the studies reviewed show that most conflict resolution strategies in many Nigerian schools were ineffective, an indication that counselling strategies have to be infused into conflict resolution approaches of schools to produce the right outcome.

Recommendations

- In view of the importance of counselling in conflict resolutions the following recommendations can be useful in addressing the challenges of ineffective conflict resolution in schools in Nigeria.
- Trained counsellors should be posted to all the schools in Nigeria because they are trained to use dialogue to resolve conflicts, which is more likely to be effective than sanction and forcing.
- There should be training and retraining workshops for counsellors on conflict resolution.
- Heads of schools should recognize the roles of counsellors in conflict resolution and allow them to feature prominently in school conflict resolutions processes.
- Workshops or seminars should be organized to train students and heads of schools on conflict resolution strategies.
- School authorities should employ counselling strategies in conflict resolution instead of relying mainly on sanction.

- Counsellors should enlighten parents about school rules and regulations and encourage them to respect conflict resolution processes of their wards' schools.
- Counsellors should have interactive sessions with students to caution them against antisocial behaviour that can breed conflicts in schools.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND SEXUAL SATISFACTION AS CORRELATES OF MARITAL STABILITY AMONG MARRIED ADULTS IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Effective communication in marriage is very important. Over the years, poor sexual satisfaction and ineffective communication in marriages have affected the growth and stability of many homes. Thus, this study investigated effective communication and sexual satisfaction as correlates of marital stability among married adults in Ogun State, Nigeria. The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey of correlational type and the population comprised all registered married adults in Ogun State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to select 394 married adults across the three senatorial districts in Ogun State. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire titled "Marital Stability, Effective Communication and Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire". The instrument was content validated by experts with reliability coefficient of 0.87.Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse the data at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that the marital stability indices of married adults in Ogun State was high with 2.97; the effective communication indices of married adults in Ogun State was high with 2.81; sexual satisfaction profile of married adults in Ogun State was good with 3.15; there was significant correlation among marital stability, effective communication and sexual satisfaction of married adults in Ogun State; The study recommended that married Adults should continue to communicate effectively in marriage and pay more attention to the feelings of their spouses; understand sexual preferences of their spouses that can enhance sexual satisfaction in marital relationship.

Keywords: Marital Stability, communication, sexual satisfaction, married adults

Introduction

Marriage is an institution that is as old as the life of man, the oldest social institution that requires a social contract between two individuals to become husband and wife. All the behaviour,

norms, roles, expectations and values associated with a man and a woman's legal union are represented by the institution of marriage that requires compatibility, dedication and understanding between married adults. For marriage to be successful and satisfactory, it must be stable, couples must communicate effectively and be sexually satisfied.

According to Ojukwu, Woko, and Onuoha (2016), marriage is the state of being united as a husband and wife with a person of the opposite sex for companionship, procreation and the maintenance of marital life. Ojukwu et al. (2016) explained that marriage has several satisfactory benefits that make a difference in one's life, and in addition to companionship, it offers financial stability as one of the satisfactory benefits of marriage. All the satisfactory advantages of marriage, however, depend on the marriage's stability. For instance, when a marriage is not stable, there are instances of separation and divorce.

Iwunze-Ibiam (2019) reported that separation in marriage rates in 2018 saw a 14% rise across Nigeria's entire population, according to a Nigerian online newspaper, Cable Newspaper, April 4. The Nigeria Catholic Reporter (2015) reported in another article on June 20, 2015, that due to the high rate of divorce, the marriage institution is increasingly collapsing. Abuja, a Federal High Court source told this magazine that there are several cases pending before the court for a divorce. Moreover, on February 25, 2020, Brand Spur Newspaper (2020) reported that an Abuja-based lawyer stated on her Twitter page that 4,000 divorce applications were filed in Abuja in just 51 days in 2020. The Brand Spur Newspaper further stated that children are always at the receiving end of the negative effect of broken homes. According to Ojukwu (2014), marital stability is fundamental to the well-being of individuals and families.

Marital stability connotes the accommodation of spouses to each other. It denotes the process by which married couples attain mutual gratification and achieve common goals while maintaining an appropriate degree of individuality. Especially important to marital stability are the sharing of experiences, interests, and values; respect for the partner’s individual needs, aims, and temperament; maintenance of open lines of communication and expression of feelings; clarification of roles and responsibilities; cooperation in decision making, problem-solving, and rearing of children; and attainment of mutual sexual gratification (Esuabana, 2019).

According to Esuabana (2019), marital stability calls for a maturity that accepts and understands the growth and development of the spouse. If this growth is not experienced and realized fully, a dearth in a marital relationship is inevitable. Marital stability is interpreted as whether a couple in a marriage remains together, instead of separating or getting divorced. Marital instability is possible, especially for the fact that the two individuals are from different backgrounds but live together. Two individuals, or in some cases one of them, can face sexual

problems. This is more common in urban settings than in rural settings. Well sexually satisfied marriages are expected to be stable and last for a long time while marriages with low sexual satisfaction end up with divorce and separation (Eneyo, Ushie, Akeh, Udonwa, Esuabana, Idika,

Itu & Antai, 2022; Ola, Oni & Akande, 2017;).

Sexual satisfaction has been described as the frequency, pleasantness and pleasure derived from sexual activity (Conradi, Noordhof, Dingemanse, Barelds & Kamphuis, 2017). The ability to keep relationships ever fresh and lively helps couples maintain and achieve sexual satisfaction over a long period of time (Fredrick, Lever, Gillespie, & Garcia, 2016). Sexual activity implies a physical proximity that may enhance emotional closeness and desire for a spouse. Scholarly discourse has established various contributors to sexual satisfaction. Fredrick, Lever, Gillespie and Garcia (2016) explained that couples who engage in more frequent virginal intercourse have greater sexual satisfaction. In differentiating between sexual drive and intimacy on satisfaction, experts suggested that the satisfaction begins to decline due to the reduction in sexual drive. This is attributed to fading away of the initial euphoria of early marriage days, when love is fresh and communication processes (Conradi, Noordhof, Dingemanse, Barelds & Kamphuis, 2017).

According to Muise, Giang, and Impett (2014), the depth of foreplay and duration of sexual activities matter for sexual satisfaction. For instance, women prefer to have more romantic-sexual repertoire such as kissing, cuddling and necking (Jankowiak, Volsche, & Garcia, 2015). It helps in the sexual initiation process, increases her sexual drive and based on the sustained feeling of intimacy before, during and after sexual act, increases the likelihood of an orgasm and completes marital satisfaction (Jankowiak, Volsche, & Garcia, 2015).

Communication is another major variable in this study. It is a process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information. It is an act of conveying meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs, symbols and semiotic rules. Communication, according to Esere (2020), is a life wire of marriage relationship or any other meaningful relationship. Esere stated that it is the elixir for ailing marital relationship, noting that many problems escalate when there is ineffective communication and many problems are resolved when there is effective communication. Communication can be said to be the glue that holds the world continents, countries, states, societies, communities, people and marriage generally, (Adekunbi, 2014). Marital communication is the study of the communication perspective in a broadly defined marriage, with intimacy and trusting relationship. The main goal of marital communication is to understand the interactions of marriage and the pattern of behaviour of couples. Open and honest communication creates an atmosphere that allows couples to express their differences as well as love and admiration for one another (Wickrama, 2012).

Marital communication is seen as face-to-face communication between couples. Marital communication is seen as a process in which couples share information, ideas and feelings which involves not only the spoken and written word but also body language, personal mannerisms and

styles (Idowu & Esere, 2015). It is a pillar which maintains the structure of peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding. (Esere, 2015) noted that communication is very vital in all areas of human life especially the marriage relationship. It was further stated that communication is a key

to a stable relationship for it allows partners to experience, love, trust, tolerance, patience and management of conflict of marriage stability.

Effective communication and sexual satisfaction usually sustain marriage with true love, honesty and trust in marriage (Sasa, 2018). Effective communication in marriage is the key to making any marriage successful and everlasting. Effective communication in marriage leads to better understanding and increases intimacy between couples. Thus, this study investigated effective communication and sexual satisfaction as correlates of marital stability among married adults in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

No human society can be stronger than effectiveness of its individual family; this implies that a society or nation in which the family, which is the basis of any community, is disintegrated is not a healthy one. Many marriages have ended in divorce or passive relationship due to ineffective communication and lack of sexual satisfaction. Many marriages breakdown weeks or months after wedding, young families who feel happy and dance from dusk to dawn during their marriage ceremony turn out to call the sugar in their tea a torn in their life.

Many factors have been identified to be responsible for marital instability, ineffective communication style as the major source of marital conflict, the researchers observed that, communication is often the missing link in an unhappy marriage. When communication between couples or married adults becomes strained, the entire foundation of the relationship is affected leading to divorce or broken home if not looked into on time.

Johnson and Ayibatari (2019) worked on effective communication in marital homes and work performance among secondary school teachers in Delta State, Nigeria. The result showed that lack of communication in marriages influenced secondary school teachers' work performance in Delta State of Nigeria. Ariguzo and Nnorom (2019) worked on nexus between gender differences and sexual satisfaction in selected married couples in Ilishan Town, Ogun State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that sexual initiation has no influence on sexual satisfaction. It depicted that sexual drive provokes sexual satisfaction more in males than in females while intimacy tends to engender sexual satisfaction more in females than in their male counterparts where the joint effect of the three variables on sexual satisfaction was tested. The study confirms intimacy as a key driver in the sexual satisfaction of married couples.

However, most of the past studies worked on the variables of marital stability, effective communication and sexual satisfaction separately in different locations in Nigeria, thus, this study investigated effective communication and sexual satisfaction as correlates of marital stability among married adults in Ogun State, Nigeria. This is the gap the study filled.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised for the study;

1. What are the marital stability indices of married adults in Ogun State?

2. What are the effective communication indices of married adults in Ogun State?
3. What is the sexual satisfaction profile of married adults in Ogun State?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant correlation among marital stability, effective communication and sexual satisfaction among married adults in Ogun State

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey of correlational type. The population for this study consisted of the entire 1,772,321 registered married adults in Ogun State (National Population Commission, 2019). The target population consists of selected married adults in Ogun State. With reference to the Research Advisor (2006), a sample size of 384 is recommended for a target population of 1,772,321. The researchers therefore increased the sample size by 5% to cater for attrition; this made a total of 400 respondents that were sampled for the study. For the purpose of this study, the researchers employed a two-stage sampling procedure to select sample for the study. In the first stage, the purposive sampling technique was used to select two Local Government Areas from each of the senatorial districts in Ogun State based on the population of married adults in the Local Government. These senatorial districts are Ogun Central, Ogun East and Ogun West. In Ogun Central; Abeokuta South and Abeokuta North were selected, in Ogun East; Ijebu Ode and Sagamu Local Governments were selected and in Ogun West; Ado-odo/Ota and Yewa South Local Governments were selected. In the second stage, random sampling technique was used to select respondents from the six selected Local Government Areas. Respondents were drawn from public organizations such as local government headquarters offices, schools and healthcare centres.

The instrument that was used for the collection of data is a researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Marital Stability, Effective Communication and Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire" A test re-test method of reliability was adopted; using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and an average coefficient score of 0.87 to ensure the reliability of the measuring instrument. Completed questionnaire forms were collected back from the respondents on the spot in order to avoid them being lost or misplaced. In analyzing the data collected for this study, both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were employed.

Results

This study collected data on investigated effective communication and sexual satisfaction as correlates of marital stability among married adults in Ogun State, Nigeria. A total of 400

questionnaire forms were administered and 394 were properly filled and valid for analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of the analyses are hereby presented thus:

Answering Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the marital stability indices of married adults in Ogun State?

Table 1: *Mean and Rank Order of Respondents' Marital Stability Indices*

N	As far as I am concerned, my spouse	Mean	S.D.	Rank order
1	takes care of me.	3.34	1.02	1st
5	makes me feel secure in the marriage.	3.31	.93	2nd
9	understands my emotions.	3.23	.88	3rd
7	appreciates me as expected.	3.23	1.00	3rd
13	family relates well with me.	3.20	1.03	5th
19	have good relationship with my family.	3.16	.99	6th
2	respects me in front of others.	3.12	.94	7th
6	loves me.	2.99	.98	8th
15	supports me in all areas of live.	2.94	.96	9th
11	sexually interacts with me.	2.92	.97	10th
10	console me when I am upset.	2.92	.99	10th
12	tolerates me.	2.89	.98	12th
18	gives regards to my family.	2.88	.98	13th
17	spends free time with me.	2.86	.99	14th
3	listens when I express my feelings.	2.83	.99	15th
8	shares every information with me about his/her feelings.	2.78	.95	16th
20	accompanies me in the training of our children.	2.74	.99	17th
4	helps me with house chores.	2.73	.96	18th
16	is patient with me.	2.71	.96	19th
14	and I manage our conflict without the help of third party.	2.68	1.05	20th
	Aggregate Mean	**2.97**		

Table 1 shows the marital stability indices of the respondents, items 1, 5, 9 and 7 with mean scores of 3.34, 3.31 and 3.23 were ranked the top 3 items respectively. Since the aggregate mean

score was 2.97 which was above the mid-cut off point of 2.50, thus the marital stability indices of married adults in Ogun State was high.

Research Question 2: What are the effective communication indices of married adults in Ogun

State?

Table 2: *Mean and Rank Order of Respondents' Effective Communication Indices*

N	While communicating with my spouse, I usually:	Mean	**S.D.**	Rank Order
1	make good eye contact	3.45	.91	1st
6	speak directly	3.11	.95	2nd
3	pay attention to his/her feelings	3.09	.94	3rd
5	speak calmly and in clear tone	3.06	.96	4th
15	consider his/her point of view	3.02	.98	5th
12	agree when am wrong	2.99	.98	6th
18	I dance whenever he makes me happy	2.89	1.02	7th
2	listen attentively	2.86	.98	8th
10	feel shy to ask for help	2.83	.95	9th
14	show appreciation for his/her kindness	2.82	1.01	10th
13	monopolize discussion `	2.75	.91	11th
17	Smile	2.69	1.03	12th
20	express myself clearly	2.67	.94	13th
7	maintain silence	2.62	1.01	14th
11	do not interrupt discussion	2.60	.98	15th
19	state my expectations	2.59	.99	16th
16	show friendly disposition	2.58	.92	17th
8	avoid distraction	2.57	1.03	18th
9	sit comfortably	2.50	1.00	19th
4	state observations without being judgmental	2.48	1.01	20th
	Aggregate Mean	**2.81**		

Table 2 shows the effective communication indices of the respondents, items 1, 6 and 3 with mean scores of 3.45, 3.11 and 3.09 were ranked the top 3 items respectively. Since the aggregate mean score was 2.81 which was above the mid-cut off point of 2.50, thus the effective communication indices of married adults in Ogun State was high

Research Question 3: What is the sexual satisfaction profile of married adults in Ogun State?

Table 3: *Mean and Rank Order of Respondents' Sexual Satisfaction Profile*

N	I am satisfied;	Mean	**S.D.**	Rank Order
17	with the frequency of which i engage in sexual intercourse with my spouse.	3.45	.95	1st
20	with the gentle talk and smile with my partner before sexual intercourse.	3.32	.96	2nd
6	when my spouse is a better lover of different sex positions.	3.31	.93	3rd
18	with the impulsiveness of my lovemaking.	3.31	.93	3rd
1	when my partner instigated sex intercourse more often	3.30	1.01	5th
19	with the foreplay involved during lovemaking.	3.27	1.01	6th
3	when my partner is more patient during sexual intercourse.	3.20	.98	7th
2	when I make love with my spouse.	3.18	.96	8th
4	when there is open communication of what my partner wants during sexual intercourse to me.	3.18	.96	8th
5	when my spouse is more thoughtful of my physical needs during sexual intercourse	3.15	.93	10th
16	with the quality of time my partner and I spend together after sexual intercourse.	3.14	.98	11th
10	when my spouse shows more love and care during intercourse.	3.12	1.02	12th
7	when my spouse could make me feel better sexually.	3.12	1.02	12th
8	when my spouse is more affectionate through foreplay.	3.11	1.01	14th
9	when my spouse is more romantic during sexual intercourse.	3.07	.93	15th
12	the time of the day i make love with my partner	3.06	.95	16th
13	and content with my capability to make my physical desires known during sexual intercourse.	3.03	1.01	17th
11	at the rate in which i reach orgasm.	3.03	1.01	17th
14	with the amount of time my partner and i spent together after sexual intercourse.	2.97	.95	19th
15	with the capacity to enjoy sex with my spouse.	2.74	1.02	20th
	Aggregate Mean	**3.15**		

Table 3 shows the sexual satisfaction profile of the respondents; items 17, 20, 6 and 18 with

mean scores of 3.45, 3.32 and 3.31 were ranked the top 3 items respectively. Since the aggregate mean score was 3.15 which was above the mid-cut off point of 2.50, thus the sexual satisfaction

profile of married adults in Ogun State was good.

Hypothesis Testing

There is no significant correlation among effective communication, sexual satisfaction and marital stability of married adults in Ogun State

Table 4a: *Regression Analysis Showing the Correlation among effective communication, sexual satisfaction and marital stability of married adults in Ogun State*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
1	Regression	790.362	2	365.181	4.291	.014[b]
	Residual	36008.409	391	92.093		
	Total	**36798.772**	**393**			

a. Dependent Variable: Marital Stability

b. Predictors: (Constant), Effective Communication, Sexual Satisfaction

The model in Table 4a indicates the linear combination of predictor variables (i.e., effective communication, sexual satisfaction). The F-value 4.291 was obtained with a p-value 0.014 when computed at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of 0.014 is less than 0.05 alpha level, the hypothesis is rejected and thus, the combination of the independent variables significantly correlates the dependent variable. Hence, there is significant correlation among effective communication, sexual satisfaction and marital stability of married adults in Ogun State.

To ascertain the contribution of the correlators together, r-square was calculated and output is presented in Table 4b.

Table 4b: *Regression Model Summary of effective communication, sexual satisfaction and marital stability of married adults in Ogun State*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.147[a]	0.021	0.016	**9.597**

Predictors: (constant), effective communication, sexual satisfaction

As shown on Table 4b, two correlators jointly contributed R-Square of 0.147 to the dependent variable (marital stability). Thus, the total variance marital stability was accounted for by the combination of effective communication and sexual satisfaction. Therefore, effective

communication and sexual satisfaction jointly explained 14.7% of the total variance on marital stability. To determine the contribution of each of the correlators, Beta Weight was calculated and

the outputs are shown in Table 4c

Table 4c: *Relative Contributions of each of the Correlators to Sexual Satisfaction*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
1	(Constant)	59.177	5.537		10.688	.000
	Sexual Satis.	.225	.082	.147	2.746	.006
	Effec. Comm.	.169	.087	.104	1.947	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Marital Stability

Table 4c shows the relative contribution of each of the correlators. As depicted from Table 4c, sexual satisfaction and effective communication have Beta weights of .147 and .104 respectively. Therefore, married adults' sexual satisfaction and effective communication are positively associated with their marital stability.

Discussion of Findings

The study highlighted several key indicators of marital stability among married adults, revealing that factors such as being cared for by one's spouse, feeling secure within the marriage, emotional understanding, and receiving appreciation play a vital role in sustaining a healthy and satisfying union. These dimensions underscore the emotional and relational investments that foster enduring marriages. Supporting these findings, Ojukwu, Woko, and Onuoha (2016) emphasized that marriage brings with it a variety of satisfactory benefits that significantly enhance one's quality of life. Beyond emotional companionship, their research pointed to financial stability as another major advantage of marital life. In contrast, these positive insights into marital satisfaction stand in opposition to the findings of Lazarides, Belanger, and Sabourin (2010), who observed that dissatisfaction in marriage often manifests through negative interaction patterns. According to their study, unhappy couples tend to exhibit behaviours such as criticism, dominance, emotional withdrawal, and a lack of supportive or problem-solving communication. Thus, while some research celebrates the protective and fulfilling aspects of marriage, others caution against the potential for destructive communication patterns that can erode its foundation.

The findings reveal that married adults exhibit effective communication behaviours such as making good eye contact, speaking directly, and being attentive to their spouse's feelings. These indicators of healthy interaction are crucial in maintaining strong marital bonds. This aligns with

the research of Esere et al. (2015), who explored the impact of poor communication and faulty

cognition on marital stability among couples in the Owerri metropolis. Their study concluded that ineffective communication patterns and distorted perceptions between partners were significant contributors to marital instability. Therefore, the presence of effective communication skills, as highlighted in this study, not only fosters understanding and emotional connection but also serves as a protective factor against the breakdown of marital relationships.

The findings suggest that sexual satisfaction among married adults encompasses several key aspects: satisfaction with the frequency of sexual intercourse, the presence of affectionate gestures such as gentle talk and smiling before intimacy, appreciation of a spouse's creativity and responsiveness during lovemaking, and the spontaneous nature of their sexual experiences. These elements collectively reflect a healthy and fulfilling sexual relationship between spouses. This supports the findings of Esuabana (2019), who emphasized that marital stability demands a level of maturity that embraces the personal growth and evolving nature of one's partner. Esuabana also highlighted that sexual satisfaction plays a critical role in sustaining long-term marital stability, whereas dissatisfaction in this area often leads to separation or divorce. Furthermore, Meaok (2017) reinforces this understanding by defining marital satisfaction as the extent to which couples experience happiness and fulfillment in their relationship. According to Meaok, marital satisfaction is shaped by a range of social and cultural influences, as well as how couples interact within their home environment. Thus, the quality of a couple's life is deeply intertwined with their level of marital satisfaction, particularly in the domain of sexual intimacy. These findings underscore the importance of mutual understanding, emotional connection, and physical fulfillment in fostering a stable and enduring marriage.

The results of the study revealed a significant correlation between sexual satisfaction, effective communication, and marital stability of married adults in Ogun State. This finding reinforces the understanding that strong communication and fulfilling sexual relationships are foundational to a stable and lasting marriage. It aligns with the work of Sasa (2018), who emphasized that marriages rooted in effective communication and sexual satisfaction are more likely to thrive, especially when coupled with core values like true love, honesty, and trust. Effective communication stands out as a critical pillar of marital success. It not only fosters mutual understanding but also strengthens emotional intimacy between partners. When couples communicate openly and respectfully, they are better equipped to navigate challenges, resolve conflicts, and deepen their connection. In turn, this communication lays the groundwork for a more satisfying sexual relationship, further reinforcing the emotional and physical bonds that sustain marital stability. These findings highlight the interconnected nature of communication, sexual satisfaction, and lasting partnership showing that when these elements are in harmony, marriages are far more likely to endure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals that married adults in Ogun State generally experience a high

level of marital stability, effective communication, and a good degree of sexual satisfaction. The data show strong indices in each area, with marital stability scoring 2.97, effective communication at 2.81, and sexual satisfaction slightly higher at 3.15. Importantly, the study found a significant correlation among marital stability, effective communication, and sexual satisfaction, indicating that these elements are interconnected in contributing to overall marital well being.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. Married adults should continue to take care of their spouses, understand their emotion and build trust to continue to enhance stability in marriage.
2. Married Adults should continue to communicate effectively in marriage and pay more attention to the feelings of their spouses.
3. Married adults should continue to understand sexual preferences of their spouses that can enhance sexual satisfaction in marital relationship.
4. Married Adults should continue to ensure proper sexual satisfaction in marital relationship for stable marriage.

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INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION COUNSELLING STRATEGIES AMONG COUNSELLORS

IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of emotional intelligence on conflict resolution counselling strategies among counsellors in higher institutions in South East Nigeria. Three research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The sample consisted of 420 counsellors drawn from a population of 650 using stratified random sampling across five higher institutions.Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (EICRSQ). The instrument was validated by three experts in educational psychology and measurement and evaluation, ensuring content and face validity. Reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.83, indicating high internal consistency. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.Findings revealed that counsellors possessed a high level of emotional intelligence (3.14). The results also showed that counsellors predominantly adopted integrative and collaborative conflict resolution strategies (2.94), while avoidance and dominating strategies were less preferred. Emotional intelligence was found to strongly influence the choice of conflict resolution strategies (3.18). Hypothesis testing showed a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and integrative strategies ($r = 0.642$, $p < 0.05$), and a significant negative relationship with dominating strategies ($r = -0.376$, $p < 0.05$).The study concluded that emotional intelligence significantly enhances effective conflict resolution counselling and recommended its integration into counsellor training programs.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Strategies

Introduction

Conflicts are a common part of human interactions, especially within social and

organizational settings such as higher institutions. These conflicts, if not properly managed, can lead to breakdowns in communication, strained relationships, poor academic performance, and even mental health issues among staff and students. As educational environments become more

complex and diverse, the role of the counsellor in managing these conflicts becomes even more vital. One of the key tools that has emerged as essential in the effective resolution of conflicts is emotional intelligence (EI).

Emotional intelligence is generally understood as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions—both one's own and those of others (Salovey, Mayer & Caruso, 2017). It includes skills such as empathy, self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, and social competence. When these emotional skills are applied in the field of counselling, they allow counsellors to respond to conflicts with empathy, clarity, and effective communication. This is especially important in higher institutions, where the student population is becoming increasingly diverse, both socially and psychologically.

In the context of higher education, students and staff come from different backgrounds, cultures, and belief systems, making the environment ripe for misunderstandings and interpersonal tensions. The role of conflict resolution counselling becomes indispensable in such settings. Conflict resolution counselling refers to the structured guidance provided by trained professionals (counsellors) to help individuals resolve disputes, improve communication, and foster peaceful coexistence. However, the success of these counselling strategies is significantly influenced by the emotional competence of the counsellor.

According to Nwosu and Okeke (2019), many conflicts in Nigerian tertiary institutions arise from poor communication, emotional immaturity, and lack of empathy, both from the students and sometimes the counsellors themselves. Counsellors who possess a high degree of emotional intelligence are better equipped to mediate conflicts in a calm, thoughtful, and unbiased manner. Such counsellors can manage their own stress and reactions while also helping the parties involved to recognize and deal with their emotions constructively.

Counsellors, as professionals trained to support the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals, play a strategic role in the conflict resolution process in schools and colleges. They are expected not only to serve as mediators but also to act as emotional anchors that provide guidance without judgment. A counsellor who lacks emotional intelligence may struggle to maintain neutrality, may misread emotional cues, or may even escalate a conflict unintentionally.

Goleman (2017) emphasized that emotional intelligence contributes more to workplace success and leadership than technical skills or IQ. This is particularly relevant in counselling, where emotional interactions are at the core of the practice. In Nigerian higher institutions, the rising number of interpersonal disputes, cult clashes, academic grievances, and even student-lecturer confrontations, points to the need for emotionally intelligent counselling interventions (Ifeanyi & Chukwuma, 2021).

In recent years, researchers and practitioners have increasingly focused on how counsellors can enhance their conflict resolution capabilities through the development of emotional intelligence. For example, Umeh and Okoye (2020) found that counsellors who received training

in emotional intelligence reported higher success rates in mediating student conflicts and helping individuals reach amicable resolutions. This suggests that emotional intelligence is not just an inborn trait but a skill that can be learned, practiced, and refined over time.

In essence, this study seeks to explore the influence of emotional intelligence on conflict resolution counselling strategies among counsellors in higher institutions in South East Nigeria. With the growing demands placed on counsellors in managing both academic and interpersonal issues within campuses, understanding how emotional intelligence contributes to their effectiveness becomes a pressing need. By focusing on counsellors in this particular region of Nigeria, the study aims to provide context-specific insights that can inform practice, training, and policy development in counselling services within tertiary education systems.

Statement of the Problem

In many higher institutions across South East Nigeria, conflicts among students, staff, and even between students and management are becoming increasingly frequent. These conflicts range from academic misunderstandings, roommate disagreements, issues of favoritism, to deeper issues such as cult-related violence, harassment, and breakdown in student-lecturer relationships. When such conflicts are not managed effectively, they escalate and lead to tension, mental distress, poor academic performance, and in severe cases, withdrawal from school or physical violence (Ibrahim & Nwankwo, 2020).

While counselling units exist in these institutions, the effectiveness of their interventions is often questioned. Students report that many counselling sessions feel impersonal, unhelpful, or judgmental. In some cases, students avoid visiting counsellors altogether because they feel misunderstood or emotionally neglected during previous encounters. This points to a gap between the professional role of the counsellor and the emotional needs of the students. It also raises concerns about how emotionally equipped counsellors are to handle conflict situations in a manner that brings about genuine resolution and psychological healing (Okafor & Ugwu, 2018).

The challenge lies not in the absence of conflict resolution strategies, but in how they are applied. Conflict resolution counselling requires more than technical knowledge—it demands a deep understanding of emotions, empathy, and human relations. Emotional intelligence becomes essential in this context. Counsellors who lack emotional intelligence may struggle to connect with their clients, misread emotional cues, or fail to remain calm and neutral in heated situations. This can hinder the conflict resolution process and cause more harm than good (Ede, Nwamuo, & Chukwuma, 2019).

In the South East region, institutions such as the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike; and several

polytechnics and colleges of education have witnessed cases of unresolved conflicts, particularly in student hostels, classrooms, and administrative offices. Reports from counselling centers in these schools indicate that many counsellors are overwhelmed and underprepared to handle the

emotional complexities that come with conflict situations (Anyanwu & Iheanacho, 2021).

Moreover, in a rapidly changing world where students are exposed to stress from academic pressure, family expectations, peer influence, and social media, the emotional terrain counsellors must navigate has become more complex. Without adequate emotional intelligence, counsellors may find themselves ill-equipped to manage these tensions or help students find lasting solutions.

Unfortunately, there is limited empirical evidence in the South East region of Nigeria to show how emotional intelligence among counsellors influences their conflict resolution practices. Most available research tends to focus on the role of emotional intelligence in student success or leadership, with little attention given to how it affects the work of counsellors, especially in conflict situations.

Therefore, the problem this study seeks to address is the lack of clarity on the extent to which emotional intelligence influences the conflict resolution counselling strategies used by counsellors in higher institutions in South East Nigeria. Without this understanding, efforts to improve counselling services in these institutions may not be fully effective, and the potential of emotional intelligence in resolving conflicts will remain untapped.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess theInfluence of Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Resolution Counselling Strategies among Counsellors in Higher Institution in South East Nigeria. While the specific objectives are to;

1. To determine the level of emotional intelligence among higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria.
2. To identify the commonly adopted conflict resolution strategies among higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria.
3. To examine the influence of emotional intelligence on the choice of conflict resolution strategies among higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria**.**

Research Questions

What is the level of emotional intelligence among higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria?

1. What are the commonly adopted conflict resolution strategies among these counsellors?
2. How does emotional intelligence influence the choice of conflict resolution strategies?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and integrative conflict resolution strategies among counsellors.

2. There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and dominating conflict resolution strategies among counsellors.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which was considered appropriate for examining how emotional intelligence influences conflict resolution counselling strategies among counsellors in higher institutions. The design enabled the researchers to collect data from a large population and describe existing relationships and patterns without manipulating any variables. The population of the study comprised all professional counsellors in selected higher institutions in South East Nigeria. The study specifically covered five institutions, with an estimated total population of approximately 650 counsellors drawn from faculties, counselling units, and student support services. A sample size of 420 counsellors was selected from the population using a standard sample size determination approach, such as the Taro Yamane formula, to ensure adequate representation at a 0.05 level of significance. To achieve fairness and representativeness, a stratified random sampling technique was employed. This ensured that counsellors from different faculties, departments, and academic ranks were proportionately included in the study, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The study was carried out in five higher institutions in South East Nigeria, focusing specifically on counsellors within academic environments rather than community-based settings. Data for the study were collected using a 30-item structured questionnaire titled *Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (EICRSQ)*. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A consisted of 15 items that measured emotional intelligence, covering key dimensions such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills. Section B also consisted of 15 items and measured conflict resolution strategies, with emphasis on integrative (collaborative) and dominating strategies, in line with the study hypotheses, as well as other approaches such as avoidance, accommodation, and compromise. The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point Likert scale, with response options of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point). The items were written in clear and simple language to ensure ease of understanding and accurate responses from the participants. To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was subjected to expert review by three specialists in educational psychology and measurement and evaluation. These experts assessed the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the objectives of the study, and their suggestions were incorporated to improve the overall quality of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha method, which yielded a coefficient of 0.83, indicating that the instrument had a high level of internal consistency and was suitable for the study. For data collection, official permission was obtained from the selected institutions, and informed consent

was secured from all participants. The questionnaires were administered directly by the researchers with the assistance of trained research assistants to ensure proper guidance and a high response rate. The data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the

Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to test the hypotheses. Specifically, the analysis examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and integrative conflict resolution strategies, as well as the relationship between emotional intelligence and dominating conflict resolution strategies, at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of emotional intelligence among higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria?

Table 1: *Mean and Standard Deviation of counsellors' Responses on Emotional Intelligence(n = 420)*

S/N	Item Statements	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	I am aware of my emotional reactions in different situations.	3.36	0.74	Agreed
2	I can control my emotions when under stress.	3.18	0.83	Agreed
3	I understand how my emotions influence my behavior.	3.24	0.77	Agreed
4	I stay calm in tense situations.	2.92	0.80	Agreed
5	I reflect before reacting emotionally.	3.02	0.78	Agreed
6	I am motivated to achieve my goals despite obstacles.	3.35	0.72	Agreed
7	I maintain a positive attitude even during challenges.	3.21	0.75	Agreed
8	I recognize emotions in others through their expressions and behaviors.	3.10	0.79	Agreed
9	I show empathy when others are experiencing emotional difficulties.	3.17	0.82	Agreed
10	I listen actively and show concern in communication.	3.26	0.77	Agreed
11	I can manage disagreements without escalating conflict.	2.95	0.81	Agreed
12	I adjust my communication approach depending on the emotions of others.	3.06	0.76	Agreed
13	I work effectively in teams by understanding group dynamics.	3.15	0.74	Agreed
14	I acknowledge others' perspectives in difficult conversations.	3.22	0.79	Agreed
15	I seek feedback on how my emotions affect others in the workplace.	2.85	0.83	Agreed
	Grand Total	**3.14**		
	Benchmark	**2.50**		

The result of the analysis presented in Table 1 addressed Research Question 1, which sought to determine the level of emotional intelligence among higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria. The findings showed that the counsellors generally agreed to all the statements

measuring emotional intelligence, as all the mean scores were above the benchmark. For example, counsellors strongly agreed that they are aware of their emotional reactions in different situations (3.36) and that they are motivated to achieve their goals despite obstacles (3.35). They also agreed that they understand how their emotions influence their behavior (3.24) and that they maintain a positive attitude even during challenges (3.21). Additionally, the respondents agreed that they can control their emotions under stress (3.18) and listen actively while showing concern during communication (3.26). Although some items had relatively lower mean values, such as the ability to manage disagreements without escalating conflict (2.95) and seeking feedback on how their emotions affect others in the workplace (2.85), these values still indicated agreement. Overall, the grand mean score of 3.14 suggests that the counsellors possess a high level of emotional intelligence. This implies that higher institutions counsellors in the South East region are emotionally self-aware, empathetic, able to manage their emotions, and capable of maintaining effective interpersonal relationships within the academic environment.

Research Question 2: What are the commonly adopted conflict resolution strategies among these counsellors?

Table 2: *Mean and Standard Deviation of Conflict Resolution Strategies Adopted by counsellors (n = 420)*

S/N	Item Statements	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	I avoid conflict situations until tensions subside.	2.42	0.91	Disagreed
2	I give in to the demands of others to keep peace.	2.33	0.94	Disagreed
3	I insist on my viewpoint to win an argument.	2.20	0.89	Disagreed
4	I seek compromise where each party gives up something.	3.18	0.76	Agreed
5	I collaborate with others to find solutions that benefit all parties.	3.36	0.70	Agreed
6	I avoid escalating disagreements by stepping away temporarily.	2.47	0.87	Disagreed
7	I adapt my conflict approach depending on the person or context involved.	3.02	0.79	Agreed
8	I am open to dialogue and hearing all sides before making a decision.	3.24	0.73	Agreed
9	I focus on long-term relationship building during conflicts.	3.10	0.78	Agreed
10	I admit when I am wrong and apologize during conflicts.	3.08	0.84	Agreed
	Grand mean	**2.94**		
	Bench Mark	**2.50**		

The result presented in Table 2 answered Research Question 2, which aimed to identify the conflict resolution strategies commonly adopted by higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria. The analysis revealed that counsellors generally disagreed with the use of avoidance,

accommodation, and domination as conflict resolution strategies. For instance, they disagreed with avoiding conflict until tensions subside (2.42), giving in to others just to maintain peace (2.33), and insisting on their own viewpoint to win arguments (2.20). They also disagreed with temporarily stepping away to avoid escalating disagreements (2.47). On the other hand, the counsellors agreed with more constructive and cooperative approaches to resolving conflict. They agreed that they seek compromise where each party gives up something (3.18), collaborate with others for mutual benefit (3.36), and adapt their conflict approach depending on the situation or individuals involved (3.02). In addition, they agreed that they are open to dialogue and consider all sides before deciding (3.24), focus on building long-term relationships during conflicts (3.10), and admit when they are wrong by apologizing (3.08). The grand mean score of 2.94 indicates that the counsellors most commonly adopt integrative and collaborative conflict resolution strategies. This suggests that higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria tend to value dialogue, cooperation, flexibility, and relationship-building when handling conflicts, rather than using avoidance or forceful approaches.

Research Question 3: How does emotional intelligence influence the choice of conflict resolution strategies?

Table 3: *Mean and Standard Deviation on the Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Conflict Resolution Strategy Choice (n = 420)*

S/N	Item Statements	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Std. Dev.	Remark

1	My emotional awareness helps me choose appropriate conflict resolution approaches.	3.22	0.76	Agreed
2	I consider the feelings of others before reacting in conflict situations.	3.30	0.72	Agreed
3	I use empathy to resolve conflicts collaboratively.	3.18	0.74	Agreed
4	I am less likely to use aggressive strategies because I manage my emotions well.	3.11	0.79	Agreed
5	My ability to stay calm helps me de-escalate tense conflicts.	3.25	0.75	Agreed
6	I use emotional regulation to guide when to confront or avoid conflict.	3.08	0.81	Agreed
7	My self-motivation influences my willingness to reach amicable solutions.	2.97	0.83	Agreed
8	My social skills help me mediate and resolve disputes professionally.	3.16	0.78	Agreed
9	I choose resolution strategies that strengthen relationships due to emotional insight.	3.12	0.76	Agreed
10	I adapt my conflict resolution strategy based on my emotional state and others'.	3.20	0.80	Agreed
	Grand Mean	**3.18**		
	Benchmark	**2.50**		

The result presented in Table 3 addresses Research Question 3, which examined how emotional intelligence influences the choice of conflict resolution strategies among higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria. The findings revealed that all the respondents agreed with each of the statements regarding the influence of emotional intelligence on how they manage and resolve conflicts. For example, counsellors agreed that their emotional awareness helps them choose appropriate conflict resolution approaches (3.22) and that they consider the feelings of others before reacting during conflict situations (3.30). They also agreed that they use empathy to resolve conflicts in a collaborative manner (3.18) and that their ability to stay calm helps them de-escalate tense situations (3.25).Furthermore, the counsellors agreed that they are less likely to use aggressive strategies because they manage their emotions well (3.11) and that their ability to regulate emotions guides when to confront or avoid conflict (3.08). Their social skills also help them mediate and resolve disputes professionally (3.16), while emotional insight influences them to choose strategies that strengthen relationships (3.12). Additionally, they agreed that self-motivation encourages them to reach peaceful solutions (2.97), and they adapt their conflict resolution strategies based on their own emotional state and that of others (3.20). The grand mean of 3.18 indicates that emotional intelligence plays a strong and positive role in shaping how counsellors handle conflict.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis One (H_{01}):

There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and integrative conflict

resolution strategies among counsellors

Table 4: *Pearson Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Integrative Conflict Resolution Strategies (n = 420)*

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	r	p-value	Decision
Emotional Intelligence	3.14	0.45	0.642**	0.000	Reject H_0 (Significant)
Integrative Conflict Resolution Strategies	3.28	0.51			

The result in Table 4 shows a **strong and significant positive relationship** between emotional intelligence and integrative conflict resolution strategies among higher institutions counsellors ($r = 0.642$, $p < 0.05$). This means that counsellors with higher levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to adopt integrative strategies such as collaboration, open communication, and mutual respect when resolving conflicts.

Hypothesis Two (H_{02}):

There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and dominating conflict resolution strategies among counsellors.

Table 5: *Pearson Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Dominating Conflict Resolution Strategies (n = 420)*

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	r	p-value	Decision
Emotional Intelligence	3.14	0.45	-0.376**	0.000	Reject H_0 (Significant)
Dominating Conflict Resolution Strategies	2.21	0.56			

The result in Table 5 reveals a **moderate but significant negative relationship** between emotional intelligence and dominating conflict resolution strategies ($r = -0.376$, $p < 0.05$). This means that counsellors with higher emotional intelligence are **less likely** to adopt dominating strategies—such as insisting on personal viewpoints or imposing authority—during conflict situations.

Discussion of Findings

The results from Table 1 showed that the respondents had a high level of emotional intelligence. All item statements recorded mean scores above the benchmark of 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.14. counsellors agreed they were emotionally aware, could manage their emotions, stayed calm under pressure, showed empathy, and communicated effectively. This finding is supported by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2016), who described emotional intelligence as the

ability to monitor one's emotions and those of others to guide thinking and behavior. Similarly, Goleman (2017) emphasized that emotionally intelligent individuals demonstrate self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and strong social skills—all of which were affirmed in this study.

counsellors' agreement on these competencies suggests that they are well-equipped emotionally to navigate interpersonal relationships and workplace dynamics, which is consistent with the findings of Adeyemo (2008), who found a high level of emotional intelligence among university staff in Nigeria.

The analysis in Table 2 revealed that counsellors mostly adopt integrative and collaborative conflict resolution strategies. The respondents agreed to using compromise, collaboration, empathy, open dialogue, and long-term relationship-building during conflicts. These strategies all scored above the 2.50 benchmark, with a grand mean of 2.94. In contrast, the counsellors disagreed with avoidance, accommodation, and dominating strategies. This aligns with Rahim (2011), who categorized conflict resolution styles into five types: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. He argued that integrating (collaborative) styles are the most effective in professional settings, especially in education, where cooperation is key. The findings also reflect those of Omoluabi (2001), who found that Nigerian academic staff prefer collaborative approaches due to the nature of academic work which requires teamwork and shared responsibilities. Additionally, Uche (2015) observed that counsellors who resolve conflicts through collaboration and compromise tend to have stronger professional relationships and contribute more positively to institutional goals. The low preference for avoidance and domination in the present study indicates that counsellors prefer to resolve issues constructively rather than through confrontation or withdrawal.

Table 3 findings showed that counsellors believed emotional intelligence strongly influences how they handle conflicts. All the items had mean scores above 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.18. The respondents agreed that their ability to stay calm, empathize, regulate emotions, and understand others helped them choose appropriate conflict resolution strategies. This result is supported by the work of Lopes et al. (2005), who found that individuals with high emotional intelligence are more effective in managing conflicts, especially in organizations. Emotional regulation and empathy are known to reduce aggressive reactions and increase the chances of achieving peaceful and constructive outcomes. Also, Salami (2010) argued that emotional intelligence enables professionals to understand the emotional tone of a conflict and respond in a way that de-escalates tension. This study confirms that emotional intelligence functions as a foundation for selecting effective conflict resolution strategies, reinforcing earlier conclusions by Brackett et al. (2011), who reported similar results among educational professionals in the U.S.

Table 4 used Pearson correlation to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and integrative conflict resolution strategies. The result showed a positive and significant relationship (**$r = .527, p < .05$**), indicating that counsellors with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to use collaborative and integrative conflict resolution strategies. This finding is consistent with the work of Jordan and Troth (2002), who found that emotional intelligence was

significantly associated with integrative conflict resolution in organizational settings. The implication is that emotionally intelligent individuals can better manage group dynamics and interpersonal relationships, which makes them more likely to engage in constructive and mutually

beneficial problem-solving. In addition, findings by Al-hamdan et al. (2017) in their study of university instructors confirmed that emotionally intelligent professionals prefer integrative methods because they value mutual understanding, fairness, and long-term collaboration.

Table 5 tested the relationship between emotional intelligence and the use of dominating conflict resolution strategies. The Pearson correlation result showed a weak and negative relationship (**r** = -0.242, $p < .05$), meaning that counsellors with high emotional intelligence are less likely to use forceful or dominating approaches during conflicts. This finding supports the argument by Mayer and Salovey (1997), who stated that emotional intelligence reduces the use of emotionally aggressive behaviors during conflict. counsellors with high emotional intelligence are more likely to manage their emotions, avoid confrontational tactics, and engage in calm, reasoned dialogue. Similarly, research by Adebayo (2013) found that emotionally intelligent individuals in Nigerian universities tended to reject dominating styles in favor of more cooperative methods. This is particularly important in the academic environment where collaboration and mutual respect are highly valued.

This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution strategies among higher institutions counsellors in South East Nigeria. The findings revealed that counsellors generally possess a high level of emotional intelligence, as demonstrated by their self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, motivation, and strong interpersonal skills. These emotional competencies were found to significantly influence how they approach and manage conflicts. Counsellors predominantly adopted collaborative and integrative conflict resolution strategies, such as compromise, dialogue, and relationship-building, while avoiding aggressive, dominating, or avoidant approaches. The study also established a strong positive correlation between emotional intelligence and the use of constructive conflict resolution strategies, and a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and the use of dominating strategies. These results highlight the critical role emotional intelligence plays in fostering peaceful and effective workplace interactions in academic environments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. University management should organize regular workshops and seminars to train counsellors on emotional intelligence skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. This will enhance their ability to manage conflicts constructively.
2. Institutions should encourage open communication, teamwork, and dialogue among counsellors to further strengthen the use of integrative conflict resolution strategies. Creating safe spaces for discussion can reduce workplace tension.

3. When appointing departmental heads, deans, or other academic leaders, emotional intelligence should be considered a key criterion. Leaders who possess emotional intelligence are more likely to resolve disputes amicably and foster positive work

relationships.

4. Departments should have trained conflict resolution units or mediators who can step in to help resolve disputes using emotional intelligence principles. This will help manage conflicts before they escalate.
5. Future studies should explore emotional intelligence and conflict management across other regions and institutions to develop comprehensive policies for academic staff welfare and institutional stability.

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ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELLING SERVICES

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Abstract

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into mental health counselling services is transforming the landscape of psychological care, offering innovative solutions to longstanding challenges such as accessibility, scalability, and individualized treatment. AI technologies are increasingly being utilized for early detection and diagnosis of mental health conditions through the analysis of behavioural data, language patterns, and social media activity. Additionally, AI-driven tools such as chatbot-based virtual therapists provide immediate, around-the-clock support rooted in evidence-based therapeutic approaches like cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). These tools can supplement traditional therapy by serving as supportive instruments rather than replacements for human counsellors, particularly in handling routine check-ins, screening, and continuous monitoring of clients' emotional states. Furthermore, AI can help expand access to care in underserved communities, where mental health professionals are scarce, by offering mobile and web-based platforms that bridge geographic and socioeconomic barriers. However, for these benefits to be fully realized, strong ethical frameworks must be established to ensure data privacy, informed consent, and responsible use of sensitive mental health information. It is also essential to address algorithmic bias by training AI systems on diverse and inclusive datasets to ensure fairness and cultural sensitivity in service delivery. Despite these advancements, concerns remain regarding the potential reduction of human empathy in therapy and the limitations of AI in handling complex emotional and psychological conditions. Therefore, continuous collaboration between mental health professionals and technology developers is necessary to ensure that AI tools are clinically effective, ethically sound, and aligned with established therapeutic practices. Human oversight remains crucial to maintain quality care and to guide the responsible integration of AI into counselling services. This paper critically examines the current applications, benefits, and limitations of AI in mental health counselling, and explores the future implications of integrating AI with traditional therapeutic models to support comprehensive, equitable, and ethical mental health care delivery.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Mental Health, Counselling Services

Introduction

Mental health disorders represent one of the most pressing public health challenges of the 21st century. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), over 970 million people worldwide were living with a mental health disorder in 2019, including depression, anxiety,

bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. The burden of these conditions has only intensified due to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability, and climate-related stressors. Despite this growing need, access to mental health care remains severely limited in many parts of the world. The global shortage of trained mental health professionals, combined with widespread stigma and systemic inequities, continues to leave millions without the support they require. In low- and middle-income countries, it is estimated that up to 85% of people with mental disorders do not receive adequate treatment (WHO, 2021).

In response to this escalating crisis, the field of mental health care is undergoing a technological transformation. Among the most promising developments is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into counselling and therapeutic services (Luxton, 2016). AI refers to the simulation of human intelligence by machines, especially computer systems capable of learning, reasoning, and self-correction. Through applications such as machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and speech and image recognition, AI systems can process and interpret vast quantities of data with remarkable speed and accuracy.

The relevance of AI in mental health stems from its potential to improve the quality, reach, and efficiency of mental health services. AI tools can analyze behavioural data and identify early signs of psychological distress, personalize treatment approaches based on individual patterns, provide consistent support through chatbot-based virtual therapists, and assist clinicians in making informed diagnostic and therapeutic decisions. These capabilities are particularly important in addressing the shortage of human resources in mental health care, where traditional therapeutic models struggle to scale with growing demand (Luxton, 2016). For instance, AI-enabled applications can serve as first points of contact for individuals hesitant to engage in face-to-face therapy due to stigma, privacy concerns, or lack of local providers.

Moreover, AI systems are being designed to function as both standalone tools and integrated support systems within broader care networks. Digital mental health platforms, augmented by AI algorithms, can offer 24/7 services, track emotional trends over time, and flag high-risk behaviours, thereby enabling more proactive and preventative approaches to care (Topol, 2019). Some programs utilize sentiment analysis in social media posts to detect suicidal ideation or depressive symptoms, while others employ predictive analytics to anticipate relapse in patients with chronic mental illnesses.

However, as with any disruptive technology, the integration of AI into mental health care raises critical questions that cannot be overlooked. Ethical concerns such as user privacy, data security, algorithmic bias, and the potential for depersonalized care are central to the discourse.

The therapeutic relationship, which traditionally hinges on empathy, trust, and human connection, may be challenged by the increasing presence of automated systems (Trokzed, et al, 2018). There is also concern about the over reliance on AI tools and the possibility that they might be used as substitutes, rather than supplements, to human clinicians. Additionally, the development and

training of AI systems require large, diverse datasets to avoid perpetuating social and racial biases—datasets that are often unavailable or non-representative.

Another major challenge is regulatory oversight. Mental health care is a highly sensitive domain, and the implementation of AI must be governed by rigorous ethical and legal standards to ensure safety, equity, and transparency (Topol, 2019). Questions around accountability in AI-assisted diagnosis or treatment, informed consent for data use, and the rights of users interacting with AI systems remain under debate. These challenges highlight the need for a multidisciplinary approach involving clinicians, technologists, ethicists, and policymakers to create AI tools that are both effective and ethically sound.

Despite these limitations, AI remains a powerful ally in the pursuit of more inclusive, efficient, and personalized mental health care. When designed and implemented responsibly, AI technologies can relieve overburdened systems, improve patient outcomes, and expand access to marginalized and remote populations. For instance, AI chatbots and mobile apps are already being used successfully in regions with scarce clinical resources, offering psychoeducation, crisis intervention, and emotional support (Fitzpatric, et al, 2017). Moreover, AI has the potential to transform the way clinicians work by reducing administrative burdens, enhancing diagnostic precision, and providing decision support tools that integrate patient history, symptom tracking, and current evidence-based practices.

This paper explores the multifaceted role of AI in enhancing mental health counselling services. It begins by examining key applications of AI, including early detection, personalized treatment, and chatbot-based therapy. It then evaluates the benefits of these technologies in terms of scalability, consistency, and accessibility (Naslund et al, 2017). Following this, the paper addresses the ethical and practical challenges associated with AI in mental health care and considers how these concerns can be mitigated through responsible development and oversight. Also, the discussion turns toward the future of AI in mental health, outlining potential advancements, collaborative frameworks, and the importance of preserving human-centered care in an increasingly digital world.

Conceptual Clarifications

Concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are designed to perform tasks that typically require human cognition. These tasks include learning from experience, understanding natural language, recognizing patterns, solving problems, and making decisions. AI systems operate through algorithms and large datasets that allow them to

process information, identify relationships, and generate predictions or actions based on learned patterns (Russell & Norvig, 2021). In essence, AI enables machines to mimic aspects of human thinking, although they do not possess consciousness or emotions.

In modern computing, AI is a broad field that incorporates several advanced technologies. One major component is **Machine Learning (ML)**, which allows systems to learn from data and improve their performance over time without being explicitly programmed. Another key area is **Natural Language Processing (NLP)**, which enables machines to understand, interpret, and generate human language in a meaningful way. This technology is widely used in chatbots, virtual assistants, and text analysis tools. Additionally, **Deep Learning**, a subset of machine learning, uses neural networks modeled after the human brain to process complex data such as images, speech, and large-scale text inputs. These interconnected technologies form the foundation of most modern AI applications.

AI systems can be classified based on their capabilities and levels of intelligence. The most common classification includes **Narrow AI** and **General AI**. Narrow AI, also known as weak AI, is designed to perform a specific task or a limited set of functions. Examples include virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa, recommendation systems used by streaming platforms, and chatbots that provide automated customer or mental health support. These systems are highly efficient within their defined scope but cannot operate beyond their programmed functions. On the other hand, **General AI** refers to a theoretical form of AI that would possess human-like cognitive abilities across a wide range of tasks, including reasoning, learning, and problem-solving in unfamiliar situations. Unlike Narrow AI, General AI does not yet exist and remains a long-term goal of AI research.

The development of AI has significantly transformed various sectors, particularly healthcare. In medical settings, AI is used to support diagnosis by analyzing medical images, predicting disease risks, and identifying early warning signs of health conditions. It also plays an important role in treatment planning by assisting healthcare professionals in selecting appropriate interventions based on patient data. Furthermore, AI is widely used in patient monitoring systems, where wearable devices and mobile applications track vital signs such as heart rate, sleep patterns, and physical activity levels. This continuous monitoring allows for early detection of health issues and more personalized care.

Overall, Artificial Intelligence represents a powerful technological advancement that enhances human capabilities by improving efficiency, accuracy, and decision-making across different fields. Its growing role in healthcare and mental health services highlights its potential to support professionals in delivering better, faster, and more accessible care, while also raising important considerations regarding ethics, privacy, and responsible use.

AI in Mental Health

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in mental health refers to the application of intelligent computational systems to identify, analyse, and support individuals experiencing psychological

and emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, stress, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic distress. These AI systems are designed to assist mental health professionals by processing large

amounts of behavioural and emotional data to detect patterns that may indicate mental health challenges. By using advanced algorithms, AI can interpret complex human behaviours and provide insights that may not always be easily observable through traditional clinical methods (Shatte, Hutchinson & Teague, 2019).

AI in mental health operates by drawing data from multiple digital sources, including speech patterns, written text, facial expressions, wearable health devices, and social media interactions. These data sources are analysed using machine learning and natural language processing techniques to identify emotional states, mood changes, and behavioural trends. For example, subtle changes in language use or tone in text messages may indicate early signs of depression or anxiety. Similarly, wearable devices can track physiological indicators such as sleep patterns, heart rate variability, and physical activity levels, which are often linked to mental well-being.

One of the major applications of AI in mental health is the **early detection of depression and other mood disorders through social media analysis**. AI algorithms can scan user-generated content to detect negative emotional expressions, repetitive sad language, or withdrawal from social interaction, which may signal psychological distress. Another important application is **predictive modelling of suicide risk**, where AI systems analyse behavioural and linguistic patterns to identify individuals at high risk and alert healthcare providers for timely intervention.

In addition, AI is increasingly used for **emotion recognition through voice and facial expression analysis**. These systems can detect subtle emotional cues such as sadness, anger, or anxiety by examining speech tone, facial micro-expressions, and eye movement patterns. This technology is particularly useful in teletherapy and remote counselling sessions where physical observation is limited. Furthermore, **mental health chatbots and virtual assistants** provide immediate psychological support to users by engaging them in therapeutic conversations, guided self-help exercises, and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)-based interventions.

Research has shown that AI has significant potential to improve mental health care delivery by enhancing early intervention, increasing accessibility, and reducing the workload on mental health professionals. In underserved and rural regions where access to psychologists and psychiatrists is limited, AI-powered tools can serve as an initial point of contact for individuals seeking help. These systems can provide continuous monitoring and support, ensuring that individuals receive timely assistance before their conditions worsen (Torous et al., 2020).

Overall, AI in mental health represents a transformative innovation that complements traditional mental health services by improving detection, expanding access, and supporting early treatment. However, its effectiveness depends on ethical implementation, accurate data interpretation, and continuous collaboration between mental health professionals and technology developers.

AI in Counselling Services

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in counselling services refers to the use of automated and

intelligent digital systems to assist, enhance, or complement the work of human therapists in delivering psychological and emotional support to individuals. Rather than replacing professional counsellors, AI is designed to function as a supportive tool that improves the efficiency, accessibility, and continuity of mental health care. These systems include AI-powered chatbots, virtual therapists, and clinical decision-support systems that help both clients and mental health professionals in different aspects of counselling practice.

AI-driven counselling tools are built using technologies such as natural language processing (NLP), machine learning, and cognitive behavioural frameworks to simulate human-like conversations and provide structured psychological interventions. One of the most widely used examples is **Woebot**, a chatbot designed based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) principles. Woebot engages users in therapeutic conversations, helping them identify negative thinking patterns and guiding them through emotional regulation techniques. Another example is **Wysa**, an AI-powered mental health assistant that supports users in managing anxiety, stress, and depression through guided conversations, mindfulness exercises, and CBT-based activities.

In counselling services, AI contributes in several important ways. One of its major roles is **providing 24/7 emotional support**, allowing individuals to access mental health assistance at any time without waiting for scheduled therapy sessions. This is especially important in crisis situations or moments of emotional distress when immediate support is needed. AI systems also offer **structured CBT exercises**, helping users work through negative thoughts, develop coping strategies, and build healthier emotional responses in a step-by-step manner.

Additionally, AI tools are used for **monitoring client progress over time**. By analysing user interactions, mood logs, and behavioural patterns, these systems can track emotional changes and provide feedback on improvement or deterioration in mental health conditions. This continuous monitoring helps both clients and therapists understand treatment effectiveness and adjust interventions when necessary. Another important contribution of AI is its role in **assisting counsellors in clinical decision-making**. AI systems can analyse large volumes of client data to identify risk factors, suggest possible treatment approaches, and highlight cases that require urgent attention, thereby improving clinical efficiency and accuracy.

Despite these benefits, it is important to emphasize that AI is not designed to replace human therapists. Human counsellors provide essential qualities such as empathy, ethical judgment, emotional understanding, and complex clinical reasoning that AI systems cannot fully replicate. Therefore, AI is best understood as a supportive tool that enhances, rather than replaces, traditional counselling services. This perspective is supported by research which highlights that AI-based therapeutic tools are most effective when integrated with human oversight and professional mental health care (Fitzpatrick, Darcy & Vierhile, 2017).

Overall, AI in counselling services represents a significant advancement in mental health care delivery by improving accessibility, consistency, and efficiency while still maintaining the central

role of human therapists in the counselling process.

Related Theory

Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT) is one of the most influential psychological frameworks in modern mental health practice and forms the theoretical foundation for many Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based mental health tools. Developed by Aaron Beck, CBT is based on the idea that human emotions and behaviours are strongly influenced by thoughts and cognitive interpretations of events rather than the events themselves (Beck, 2011). When individuals develop negative or distorted thinking patterns—such as overgeneralization, catastrophizing, or self-blame—these thoughts can contribute to emotional distress and mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety.

CBT aims to help individuals identify, challenge, and replace these negative thought patterns with more balanced and realistic thinking. It also encourages behavioural change by promoting healthier coping strategies and positive actions that improve emotional well-being. Because of its structured and practical approach, CBT is highly suitable for integration into digital mental health systems.

AI-powered counselling tools adopt CBT principles by replicating key therapeutic techniques in automated formats. For instance, these systems are programmed to **identify negative thought patterns through conversation analysis**, where natural language processing is used to detect emotionally charged or distorted language in user inputs. Based on this analysis, the AI can provide guided responses that help users reflect on their thoughts and emotions. Additionally, AI systems offer **cognitive restructuring exercises**, which encourage users to reframe negative thoughts into more rational and constructive alternatives. Another important application is **behavioural activation tasks**, where users are guided to engage in positive activities such as exercise, social interaction, or mindfulness practices to improve mood and reduce depressive symptoms.

Through these mechanisms, CBT provides the theoretical backbone that enables AI systems to deliver structured, evidence-based psychological support in a scalable and accessible way.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), is a widely used framework for understanding how individuals come to accept and use new technologies. According to this model, two main factors determine user acceptance: **perceived usefulness** and **perceived ease of use**. Perceived usefulness refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a system will enhance their performance or well-being, while perceived ease of use refers to

how effortless the system is to use. In the context of Artificial Intelligence in mental health counselling services, TAM is particularly important in explaining user engagement with AI-based

tools such as chatbots, virtual therapists, and mental health apps. Individuals are more likely to adopt these technologies if they believe that the tools are effective in improving their mental health and are easy to interact with without requiring technical expertise. For example, if a mental health chatbot provides meaningful emotional support and is simple to navigate, users are more likely to continue using it consistently. However, if the system is perceived as complicated, impersonal, or unhelpful, users may discontinue its use regardless of its clinical value. Therefore, TAM helps researchers and developers understand the behavioural factors that influence the adoption and long-term use of AI in counselling services. Overall, both CBT and TAM provide essential theoretical foundations for understanding how Artificial Intelligence operates within mental health counselling and why users engage with these technologies in different ways.

Role of Artificial Intelligence in Mental Health Counselling Services

AI plays several significant roles in modern counselling services:

1. AI systems analyze behavioural patterns, language use, and digital footprints to detect early signs of mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety (Shatte et al., 2019).
2. Wearable devices and mobile apps track sleep, mood, and activity levels, allowing counsellors to monitor patient progress in real time.
3. AI-driven chatbots provide immediate psychological support using evidence-based approaches like CBT. They help users manage stress, anxiety, and emotional distress at any time of day.
4. AI platforms bridge gaps in mental health services, especially in rural and underserved areas where professional counsellors are limited (Torous et al., 2020).
5. AI assists counsellors by analyzing patient data and suggesting treatment options, improving accuracy and efficiency in clinical decision-making.
6. AI reduces the burden on mental health professionals by automating routine tasks such as screening and follow-up assessments.

Suggestions

To improve the effectiveness and ethical use of AI in mental health counselling services, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. AI should complement, not replace human therapists to preserve empathy and human connection in counselling.
2. Strict data privacy and security frameworks must be implemented to protect sensitive patient information.
3. AI systems should be trained on diverse datasets to reduce cultural and algorithmic bias.

4. Continuous collaboration between psychologists and AI developers is essential for clinically effective systems.

5. Government regulation and ethical guidelines should be strengthened to monitor AI use in mental health services.
6. Public awareness programs should be introduced to increase trust and acceptance of AI-based counselling tools.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence is transforming mental health counselling services by improving accessibility, efficiency, and early intervention capabilities. AI-powered systems such as chatbots, predictive models, and monitoring tools offer innovative ways to support individuals experiencing mental health challenges. However, despite its benefits, AI cannot replace human empathy, ethical judgment, and professional therapeutic relationships. Therefore, the future of mental health care lies in a hybrid model, where AI supports counsellors rather than replacing them. With proper regulation, ethical safeguards, and collaboration between technology experts and mental health professionals, AI can significantly enhance the quality and reach of mental health counselling services worldwide.

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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 maneouver interpersonal dynamics, manage stress, communicate effectively, and settle conflicts with empathy and fairness.

Ethics, in professional practices serve as a guiding moral in education, to reinforce

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 ethics in educational dispute resolution.

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. **H_{01}:** There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and dispute resolution effectiveness. **H_{11}:** There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and dispute resolution effectiveness.
2. **H_{02}:** Ethical practices do not significantly influence dispute resolution outcomes. **H_{12}:** Ethical practices significantly influence dispute resolution outcomes.
3. **H_{03}:** Emotional intelligence and ethics do not jointly predict effective dispute resolution. **H_{13}:** 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

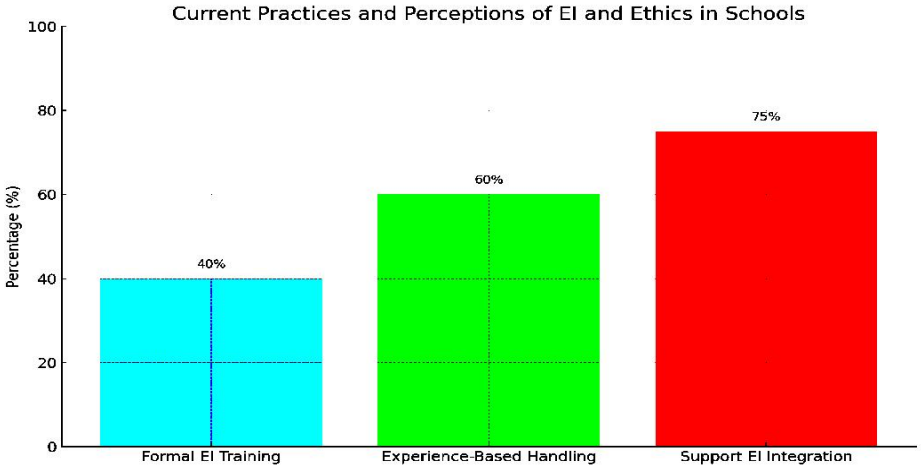

Figure 1 illustrates the survey findings on current practices and perceptions of emotional intelligence (EI) and ethics among school personnel. The data reveal that only 40% of educators

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 are 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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RELIGIOUS COUNSELLING: A TOOL FOR PROMOTING NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Religious counseling has emerged as a vital, though often overlooked, tool in addressing the complex security challenges facing Nigeria. This paper examines the role of religious counseling in promoting national security by exploring its theoretical foundations, practical applications, and policy relevance. Using frameworks such as Social Learning Theory, Human Needs Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory. The study illustrates how spiritual guidance, moral reorientation, and interfaith dialogue can reduce radicalization, foster social cohesion, and support post-conflict reconciliation. Key concepts including national security, radicalization, peacebuilding, and religious extremism are clarified within the Nigerian context to highlight their interconnections. Drawing from recent empirical studies and real-life case examples, the paper demonstrates how religious counselors—particularly pastors, imams, and faith-based therapists serve as agents of peace, healing, and moral reform. Challenges such as religious manipulation, inadequate training, and institutional resistance are also discussed. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for policy integration, community engagement, and institutional support for faith-based counseling interventions. Ultimately, it argues that sustainable national security in Nigeria must go beyond military responses to include culturally rooted, spiritually driven solutions like religious counseling. Such an approach not only addresses the symptoms of insecurity but also tackles its moral and psychological roots, paving the way for a more peaceful and united nation.

Keywords: Religious counseling, national security, radicalization, peace building, Nigeria, social cohesion.

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, continues to face persistent threats to its national security which ranges from the insurgency of Boko Haram in the Northeast to farmer-herder clashes in the Middle Belt and rising incidents of banditry and kidnapping across various regions,

the nation's security landscape remains complex and fragile (Adesoji, 2017; Ogundiya, 2020). Despite the deployment of military force, intelligence operations, and political dialogue, these measures alone have proven insufficient in tackling the root causes of insecurity. This reality has spurred renewed interest in exploring alternative and complementary strategies one of which is

religious counselling.

Religious counseling is a counselling approach grounded in spiritual guidance, moral instruction, and emotional healing through religious frameworks, has the power to shape attitudes, influences behaviour, and rebuild fractured communities. In a nation where religion penetrates every aspect of life with over 90% of Nigerians identifying as either Christian or Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2017). Faith-based leaders and institutions command deep trust and wield significant social influence. These leaders often serve as counsellors, community gatekeepers, and moral compasses. As such, their role in promoting peace, discouraging extremism, and offering hope to the disenfranchised is both strategic and necessary (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2018).

Evidence suggests that religious counselling has been effective in rehabilitating former insurgents, promoting interfaith dialogue, and reducing youth involvement in violent activities (Salihu & Madaki, 2019). More than just sermons, religious counselling involves structured interventions, conflict mediation, trauma recovery, and reintegration programs that address both spiritual and psychological needs. When religious leaders speak out against violence and champion forgiveness, tolerance, and reconciliation, they help to create a culture of peace that goes beyond the reach of political decrees or military campaigns (Adebayo, 2021).

This paper investigates religious counselling as a tool for promoting national security in Nigeria, focusing on how religious actors and institutions can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding and counter-violence initiatives. It contends that integrating religious counselling into national security efforts is not only culturally appropriate but also a potentially transformative strategy for long-term stability. The paper examined successful models, current gaps, and practical recommendations for policymakers, religious leaders and institutions, and civil societies. In a time when national unity feels increasingly strained, and citizens sought for answers beyond government pronouncements, the pulpit may yet prove to be one of the strongest platforms for peace.

Conceptual Literature Review

Religious Counselling

Religious counseling is a process that blends psychological support with spiritual guidance, often grounded in the values and doctrines of a religious tradition. It involves using religious principles, scriptures, and moral teachings to guide individuals in coping with personal, social, or existential problems. In the Nigerian context, religious counseling is typically delivered by pastors, imams, chaplains, or trained faith-based counselors, often in places of worship, schools, or correctional facilities.

For instance, Uwe (2018) clarifies that, religious counseling in Africa is not only therapeutic but also a form of moral instruction and social control, aimed at shaping behavior, restoring relationships, and promoting peaceful co-existence. The counsellor uses tools such as prayer,

scripture, confession, and religious dialogue to guide counselees toward peace, repentance, and ethical living.

The most important is that, religious counseling does not replace professional psychological therapy, but it complements it, particularly in culturally and spiritually grounded societies like Nigeria where religion plays a central role in identity and morality (Ogunleye & Oladipo, 2020). Through religious counseling, individuals are taught to resolve conflicts peacefully, forgive offenses, obey laws, and reject violence all of which contribute significantly to national peace and stability.

National Security

National security refers to the protection of a nation from internal and external threats that could undermine its sovereignty, safety, economic well-being, or social stability. Traditionally, national security was viewed narrowly as a military concern, but contemporary definitions include economic resilience, social justice, political inclusion, and community peace (Bassey & Okon, 2016).

In Nigeria, national security challenges include terrorism which includes the activities of terrorist groups like (e.g., Boko Haram, ISWAP), banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, ethnic agitation, kidnapping, cybercrime, and political violence. These threats often have religious or ideological undertones, making religious counseling a potentially transformative tool in mitigating them.

Religious counselling contributes to national security by promoting moral reorientation, reducing violent extremism, and supporting trauma healing in conflict-affected communities. For instance, Odukoya and Agbaje (2021) argued that, security should not be defined only by weapons and policing, but by the level of peace, trust, and ethical behavior in society.

Radicalization

Radicalization is the process by which individuals adopt extreme beliefs or ideologies that may lead to the justification of violence to achieve certain goals. In Nigeria, radicalization has been particularly associated with religious extremism, where young people are recruited into terrorist groups under the guise of religious jihad or defense of faith.

Religious counseling counters radicalization by offering alternative narratives rooted in compassion, moderation, and peace. Through dialogue, theological correction, and emotional support, counselors can deconstruct extremist ideologies and redirect individuals toward socially acceptable behaviors (Suleiman & Bello, 2019). In areas like Borno and Yobe, where radicalization has been severe, religious counseling has helped ex-combatants reintegrate into society and abandon violence.

Peace building

Peace building refers to the processes that create conditions for lasting peace in societies

affected by conflict. This includes reconciliation, justice, trauma healing, education, and the reformation of institutions that perpetuate violence or inequality. Religious counseling plays a key role in peace building, especially in post-conflict societies like Nigeria. Faith-based counselors promote forgiveness, healing, and dialogue. For example, Christian and Muslim leaders have facilitated counseling sessions that brought victims and perpetrators of communal violence together for mutual understanding and reconciliation (Adegbite, 2022). Through such efforts, the emotional wounds of war and conflict are addressed, and the cycle of retaliation is broken.

Religious Extremism

Religious extremism is the distortion of religious beliefs to justify violence, hatred, or exclusion of others. It often emerges in societies with high levels of poverty, illiteracy, political corruption, and religious manipulation. In Nigeria, both Christian and Muslim extremists have used scripture out of context to provoke violence and division (Ahmed, 2017).

Religious counseling combats extremism by teaching correct interpretations of sacred texts, emphasizing love, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. When religious counselors are trained to recognize early signs of extremism, they can intervene through pastoral care, theological dialogue, and community mobilization.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion refers to the strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a society. A cohesive society is one where citizens cooperate across ethnic, religious, and class lines to achieve common goals and maintain peace. In a pluralistic nation like Nigeria, promoting social cohesion is vital for national security. As Ibrahim (2023) notes, religious counseling has succeeded in building trust between rival communities in several parts of Northern Nigeria, fostering a sense of shared humanity and reducing fear. The following are some of the contributions of religious counselling to social cohesion.

1. It encourages interfaith dialogue among different religious followers.
2. It teaches empathy and forgiveness among members of a given community.
3. It promotes ethical leadership and responsible citizenship.

Theoretical Review

The application of religious counseling as a strategic intervention for national security can be situated within several relevant psychological, sociological, and counseling theories. These theories provide an academic foundation to understand how values, beliefs, and interpersonal guidance influence human behavior, particularly in the context of violent extremism, deviance, and moral decline. This section highlights key theories that underpin the study and their relevance and providing.

Social Control Theory

Originally proposed by Hirschi (1969), Social Control Theory posits that strong social bonds,

particularly to institutions like family, school, and religion, prevent individuals from engaging in deviant or criminal behavior. According to this theory, individuals are less likely to commit acts that threaten societal order when they are integrated into moral frameworks that emphasize conformity, responsibility, and discipline.

Religious counseling, by reinforcing these social bonds especially moral commitment to divine authority reduce anti-social behaviors that threaten national peace (Ibrahim & Musa, 2019). The religious counselor, in this sense, becomes a medium through which pro-social norms are internalized, and national loyalty is enhanced. As such, the theory supports the argument that religion-based guidance contributes to internal security by promoting behavioral self-regulation.

Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioral Theory which is mostly abbreviated as (CBT) was developed by Aaron Beck, emphasizes the role of thought patterns in shaping behavior. Individuals engage in destructive or anti-social behaviors when they possess irrational, distorted, or radical beliefs. CBT aims to correct these faulty cognitions and replace them with rational, value-based alternatives (Beck, 2011).

Religious counseling integrates the cognitive restructuring goals of CBT with scriptural teachings, offering individuals both emotional healing and value reorientation (Afolabi & Olanrewaju, 2020). For individuals involved in violence, religious counseling offers a platform to challenge extremist ideologies and adopt peaceful, community-friendly beliefs thus contributing to national security.

Moral Development Theory

Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory suggests that moral reasoning develops through stages, from obedience to law-and-order reasoning, and finally to universal ethical principles. Religious counseling often promotes such progression by offering ethical teachings and accountability rooted in spiritual values (Odeh & Ahmed, 2018).

In the Nigerian context, many youths at risk of being recruited into violent activities often act at a lower level of moral reasoning—driven by impulse, peer influence, or religious misinterpretation. Religious counseling interventions encourage reflection on justice, peace, and responsibility, thereby elevating the moral consciousness necessary for national peace building (Okoye, 2021).

Peace building Theory

Peace building Theory, particularly as developed by Johan Galtung and furthered by Lederach (1995), emphasizes the importance of addressing root causes of conflict, building

relationships, and reconstructing societies after violence. It promotes non-violent approaches like dialogue, reconciliation, and community education.

Religious counseling aligns with this theory because it promotes inner peace, forgiveness, and interpersonal understanding, which are essential tools in post-conflict environments and in preventing future violence (Nwachukwu & Idris, 2022). By equipping individuals with spiritual tools to cope with trauma, resolve conflict, and promote tolerance, religious counseling becomes not just a therapeutic activity, but a nation-building strategy.

Social Learning Theory

This theory posits that people learn behaviors, attitudes and norms through imitation and observation of role models, in religious context, clergy and spiritual leaders serve as powerful role models who shape moral behaviors through sermons, counseling and live examples. So in Nigeria, where religious leaders are deeply respected, their guidance especially when delivered through counseling can deter young people from engaging in extremist or criminal behavior by promoting peaceful and pro-social alternatives grounded in religious values.

It finally shows that, these theories Social Control Theory, Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, Moral Development Theory, Peace building Theory and Social learning theory collectively support the rationale that religious counseling can influence behavior, reduce deviance, and promote social harmony. They provide an academic basis for analyzing how religion-based interventions contribute to national security not only by deterring violence but by instilling peace-oriented values in individuals and communities.

Integration into Education Curriculum

1. Integration into Educational Curriculum: Religious counseling should be incorporated into secondary and tertiary institutions to build moral values and conflict resolution skills early.
2. Capacity Building for Faith Leaders: Training programs should be organized for pastors, imams, and faith-based counselors on psychological first aid, trauma healing, and de-radicalization strategies.
3. Government Collaboration with Religious Bodies: The Ministry of Interior and the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should collaborate with churches, mosques, and faith-based NGOs in peace promotion programs.
4. Counseling Centers in Conflict Zones: Establish interfaith counseling centers in volatile areas such as Plateau, Borno, and Benue states to help victims of trauma and reintegrate former extremists.
5. Use of Media and Technology: Promote religious peace messages through radio, TV, and social media to counter online radical propaganda.

Challenges and Limitations

Religious Manipulation: Some religious leaders may misuse their platform to incite violence

or spread hate, defeating the purpose of counseling.

i. Lack of Professional Training: Not all religious counselors are trained in psychology or conflict resolution, which limits their effectiveness.
ii. Distrust Between Faith Groups: Mistrust among Christian and Muslim communities may hinder interfaith counseling initiatives.
iii. Insufficient Government Support: Religious counseling is often underfunded or ignored in official peace and security policies.

Case Studies / Real-Life Examples

1. Borno State Interfaith Dialogue Program: After years of Boko Haram insurgency, a joint Christian-Muslim counseling initiative helped reintegrate over 200 ex-combatants into society (Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2019).
2. Kaduna Peace Counseling Project (2021): Following recurring ethnoreligious clashes, counselors trained by a religious NGO offered trauma therapy and conflict resolution sessions to over 500 victims and youth leaders.
3. Jos City Church and Mosque Collaboration: In 2022, leaders of major churches and mosques in Jos co-organized counseling forums addressing tribal hate speech and promoting forgiveness

Conclusion

Religious counseling has increasingly been recognized as a preventive and rehabilitative strategy in addressing issues of insecurity, radicalization, and social unrest. Studies by Adebayo (2017) and Ojo and Adekunle (2019) show that religious institutions in Nigeria have historically played a key role in promoting peace through sermons, dialogue, and rehabilitation programs. Umar and Abdulazeez (2020) found that interfaith counseling initiatives helped to reduce youth radicalization in Northern Nigeria by promoting empathy and mutual respect. Similarly, Olanrewaju (2021) documented the role of Christian and Islamic counseling services in fostering post-conflict reconciliation in Kaduna State. These efforts helped restore inter-group trust and reduce the likelihood of reprisal attacks. Research by Dogo (2018) highlights that religious leaders trained in counseling were more effective in deradicalizing youth than conventional security measures. Such findings affirm that religious counseling is not only spiritually important but also a valuable social intervention tool.

Religious counseling remains a potent and often underutilized tool in promoting national security in Nigeria. Unlike conventional security measures that respond to violence, religious

counseling offers preventive, moral, and emotional healing interventions rooted in cultural and spiritual values. By shaping conscience, promoting forgiveness, and guiding youth away from violence, religious counseling contributes directly to building a peaceful and united Nigeria.

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AMONG COUNSELLORS AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN OWERRI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, IMO STATE

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence and Conflict resolution Strategies among counsellors and public officials in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, involving a population of 300 practicing counsellors, from which a sample of 150 was randomly selected using a stratified sampling technique. Data were collected using a validated structured questionnaire titled "Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution and Counselling Effectiveness Questionnaire (EICRCEQ)". Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, ANOVA, and t-tests, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. Findings revealed that counsellors exhibited high levels of emotional intelligence, particularly in empathy, self-awareness, and relationship management. EI was found to be significantly and positively correlated with constructive conflict resolution styles (collaboration and compromise) and counselling effectiveness. However, the study also found that formal training in emotional intelligence was lacking among most professionals, despite a strong desire for such training. The study concludes that emotional intelligence is a vital skill in conflict management and counselling. It recommends that emotional intelligence (EI) training should be systematically integrated into professional development programmes, school curricula, and public service policies as a strategic approach to improving conflict management, strengthening interpersonal relationships, enhancing productivity, and promoting emotional well-being across institutions within Owerri Municipal Council.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution, Counselling, Empathy, Public Institutions, Imo State

Introduction

Conflicts are an inevitable part of human interaction and organizational life, particularly in diverse and dynamic settings like educational institutions, government councils, and social groups. In the Nigerian context, particularly in urban areas such as Owerri Municipal Council in Imo State,

scholars have identified misunderstandings, communication gaps, cultural diversity, value differences, and emotional mismanagement as contributing factors to conflict situations (Obasi & Nwachukwu, 2022). Unresolved conflicts can lead to tension, reduced productivity, strained relationships, and, in extreme cases, violence or breakdown of institutional functions (Oboegbulem & Alfa, 2018). Counselling, as a professional intervention, plays a critical role in resolving such conflicts by fostering understanding, promoting dialogue, and facilitating personal growth. However, the effectiveness of counselling interventions is largely dependent on the emotional competence of both the counsellor and the individuals involved. This underscores the importance of Emotional Intelligence (EI), a concept that has gained global recognition since the work of Mayer and Salovey (2023), and popularized by Daniel Goleman (2022). EI involves the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions constructively to guide thinking and behavior, particularly in times of stress and conflict. Research has shown that individuals with high emotional intelligence are more capable of navigating interpersonal conflicts, demonstrating empathy, and communicating effectively (Bar-On, 2006; Brackett, Rivers & Salovey, 2019). In conflict-laden environments such as schools and municipal offices, emotionally intelligent behaviour can make the difference between escalation and resolution.

The present study seeks to examine how emotional intelligence can be harnessed for effective conflict resolution and counselling in Owerri Municipal Council. It will explore the levels of EI among counsellors and public officers, the relationship between EI and conflict resolution outcomes, and practical ways to integrate EI training into conflict management and counselling practices. The major concepts that underpin this study are Emotional Intelligence (EI), conflict resolution, and counselling. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and utilize one's own emotions as well as those of others to guide thinking and behaviour (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). It encompasses key components such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, which are essential for effective interpersonal interaction and conflict management. Emotional intelligence is a key variable in this study, as it significantly influences how individuals understand and respond to interpersonal conflicts, as well as how they deliver emotionally responsive counselling services. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are more likely to demonstrate empathy, emotional regulation, and effective communication, which are essential in conflict situations.

Conflict resolution refers to the process through which two or more parties seek to reach a peaceful and mutually acceptable solution to a disagreement or dispute (Deutsch, 2018). The

literature identifies several conflict resolution strategies, including competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating, each varying in levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness (Thomas & Kilmann, 2021). Among these strategies, collaboration is often considered the most constructive approach, as it promotes open communication, mutual

understanding, and sustainable solutions.

Emotional intelligence is a crucial variable in this study because it influences how counsellors respond to clients' emotional needs and interpersonal challenges. Emotionally intelligent counsellors are more effective in building trust, managing emotionally intense counselling sessions, and guiding clients toward healthy and constructive choices. This effectiveness stems from their ability to demonstrate empathy, regulate their emotions, and communicate appropriately within the counselling relationship. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence enhances interpersonal competence, which is essential for successful counselling and conflict resolution.

Emotional regulation is a fundamental component of emotional intelligence. It refers to the processes through which individuals influence the emotions they experience, the timing of these emotions, and how such emotions are expressed (Gross, 1998). In counselling and conflict resolution settings, emotional regulation enables professionals to remain calm, objective, and supportive, even in highly emotional situations. This ability is particularly important for counsellors and conflict managers, as it helps prevent escalation and promotes constructive engagement between conflicting parties.

This study is anchored on three core psychological and behavioural theories that explain how emotional intelligence influences conflict resolution and counselling effectiveness. The Emotional Intelligence Theory was first proposed by Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (1990), who defined emotional intelligence as the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, discriminate among them, and use this information to guide thinking and actions. The theory was later expanded by Daniel Goleman (1995), who identified five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These components are essential for effective interpersonal interaction, making the theory highly relevant to counselling and conflict resolution. The Person-Centered Counselling Theory developed by Carl Rogers (1951) emphasizes empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard as core conditions for effective counselling. The theory posits that individuals are more likely to achieve personal growth when they feel understood and accepted. This perspective aligns closely with emotional intelligence, particularly in the areas of empathy and emotional regulation. It explains why emotionally intelligent counsellors are more effective in creating a safe and supportive environment for clients. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Theory explains the different strategies individuals use in handling conflict, including competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. These strategies vary in terms of assertiveness and cooperativeness. The theory is

relevant to this study because emotional intelligence influences how individuals choose and apply these conflict resolution strategies, particularly the use of collaborative approaches that promote mutual understanding and lasting solutions.

Several empirical studies, both globally and within Nigeria, have examined the relationship

between emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and counselling effectiveness. Afolabi (2017) investigated the role of emotional intelligence in conflict management among Nigerian university students. The findings revealed that students with higher levels of emotional intelligence were significantly more capable of managing interpersonal conflicts constructively. The study recommended the integration of emotional intelligence training into student development and leadership programmes. Ofole and Odusanya (2017) conducted a study in Lagos State to examine the influence of emotional intelligence on counselling performance among secondary school counsellors. The results indicated that counsellors with high emotional intelligence were more effective in establishing therapeutic relationships, managing clients' emotions, and applying appropriate counselling techniques. Ugoani (2020) explored emotional intelligence and conflict management in Nigerian organizations. The study found that individuals with high emotional intelligence demonstrated better conflict management skills, maintained stronger interpersonal relationships, and contributed to improved organizational productivity.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is an inherent and often unavoidable aspect of human interaction, particularly within social, educational, and organizational settings. In Nigeria, and especially in urban centres such as Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State, conflicts have been reported in schools, workplaces, and community settings among students, teachers, public servants, and other stakeholders (Nwankwo, 2020; Obasi & Nwachukwu, 2022). These conflicts may be associated with factors such as poor emotional regulation, ineffective communication, lack of empathy, and the use of inappropriate conflict resolution strategies. When not effectively managed, such conflicts can result in strained relationships, reduced productivity, and psychological distress.\n\n> Although counselling services and conflict resolution mechanisms exist in many schools and public institutions, studies suggest that these interventions do not always produce optimal outcomes (Ofole & Odusanya, 2017). This limitation may be linked to insufficient emphasis on emotional intelligence competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills, which are essential for constructive conflict management. Emotional intelligence, as established in the literature, enhances individuals' ability to understand and regulate emotions, improve communication, and facilitate peaceful resolution of disputes (Salovey & Mayer, 1997; Goleman, 1995). However, within the context of Owerri Municipal Council, there appears to be limited empirical evidence on the extent to which emotional intelligence is integrated into counselling practices and conflict resolution processes. It is also unclear whether counsellors and administrative personnel possess adequate training in emotional intelligence, particularly in

managing emotionally charged situations. This gap underscores the need for further investigation into how emotional intelligence can be harnessed to improve counselling effectiveness and conflict resolution outcomes in the area.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution strategies of counsellors and administrative officials in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Assess the level of emotional intelligence among counsellors and administrative officials.
- Investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and the conflict resolution strategies employed by counsellors and administrative officials.
- Examine the contribution of emotional intelligence to counselling effectiveness, particularly in addressing emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal challenges among students and public officials.
- Explore the extent to which emotional intelligence training and awareness are integrated into the professional development programs of educators, counsellors, and public officials in Owerri Municipal Council.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the investigation into the role of emotional intelligence in conflict resolution and counselling within Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State:

- What is the level of emotional intelligence among counsellors and administrative officials in Owerri Municipal Council?
- How does emotional intelligence influence the conflict resolution strategies employed by counsellors and administrative officials?
- To what extent does emotional intelligence affect the effectiveness of counselling practices in addressing emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal challenges?
- What is the level of awareness and integration of emotional intelligence training in the professional development programs of educators, counsellors, and public officials in Owerri Municipal Council?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in line with the research questions to be tested statistically in the course of the study:

H_{01}: There is no significant level of emotional intelligence among counsellors and administrative officials in Owerri Municipal Council.

H_{02}: Emotional intelligence does not significantly influence the conflict resolution strategies employed by counsellors and administrative officials.

H_{03}: Emotional intelligence does not significantly affect the effectiveness of counselling practices in addressing emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal challenges.

H_{04}: There is no significant level of awareness and integration of emotional intelligence training in the professional development programs of educators, counsellors, and administrative officials in Owerri Municipal Council.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design with a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. This design was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect and analyze data from participants in their natural settings without manipulating variables, while also exploring participants' perceptions and experiences in depth. The target population for the study comprised all professional counsellors and administrative officials working in public secondary schools and governmental institutions within Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State. According to official records from the Imo State Ministry of Education and Local Government Service Commission (2024), the population consisted of approximately 300 registered professionals, including full-time school counsellors and governmental welfare officers. From this population, a sample of 150 participants was drawn, representing 50% of the population, which is considered statistically adequate for survey research (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure fair representation across institutional roles, gender, and years of professional experience, thereby accounting for potential differences in emotional intelligence levels and conflict resolution practices.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution, and Counselling Effectiveness Questionnaire (EICRCEQ), developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. Section A captured demographic information such as age, gender, institution type, years of experience, and training in emotional intelligence. Section B, the Emotional Intelligence Scale, contained 20 items adapted from Goleman's Emotional Competency Framework and the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), measuring self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness (empathy), and relationship management on a five-point Likert scale. Section C, the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory, consisted of 15 items based on the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), assessing respondents' preferred conflict management styles: Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating. Section D, the Counselling Effectiveness Inventory, included 15 items assessing counselling performance, focusing on quality of interactions, management of clients' emotions, problem-solving abilities, and session impact, also rated on a five-point scale. The draft instrument was subjected to content and face validation by

three experts in educational psychology and measurement, and subsequently pilot-tested on 30 counsellors outside the study area. Reliability analysis yielded high Cronbach's alpha coefficients: Emotional Intelligence ($\alpha = 0.88$), Conflict Resolution ($\alpha = 0.84$), and Counselling Effectiveness ($\alpha = 0.86$), indicating strong internal consistency.

For the qualitative component, structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with counsellors, teachers, and administrative officials to gain deeper insights into the application of emotional intelligence in counselling and conflict resolution. The discussions explored real-life conflict cases, use of emotional intelligence in interventions, challenges faced, and areas needing further training or support. All sessions were recorded with consent, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes.

The questionnaires were distributed to a cross-section of participants in selected schools and government offices. Out of 150 questionnaires distributed, 138 were fully completed, yielding a 92% response rate, while incomplete responses were discarded. Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize demographic information, emotional intelligence levels, conflict resolution styles, and counselling effectiveness. Inferential statistics included Independent Samples t-tests, One-Way ANOVA, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, applied to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. The t-test compared participants with and without emotional intelligence training (HO4), ANOVA compared EI levels across different professional groups (HO1), and Pearson correlation examined the relationships between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution strategies (HO2) as well as counselling effectiveness (HO3). Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to complement the quantitative findings and provide richer understanding of how emotional intelligence is applied in real-life counselling and conflict resolution scenarios.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of emotional intelligence among counsellors in Owerri Municipal Council?

Emotional Intelligence Components	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Self-awareness	4.12	0.53	High
Self-regulation	3.89	0.61	Moderate-High
Empathy (social awareness)	4.05	0.58	High
Relationship management	3.91	0.66	Moderate-High
Overall EI Score	4.00	0.59	High

The results indicate that respondents have a generally high level of emotional intelligence, with strong abilities in self-awareness and empathy. However, self-regulation and relationship

management are slightly lower, suggesting some room for improvement in managing emotions and interpersonal relationships.

Research Question 2: How does emotional intelligence influence conflict resolution strategies adopted by school counsellors and public officials?

Conflict Resolution Style	Mean Score	Relationship with EI (r)	Significance (p)	Interpretation
Collaborating	4.21	0.68	0.000	Strong positive
Compromising	3.90	0.61	0.000	Moderate positive
Avoiding	2.22	-0.35	0.003	Weak negative

Emotional intelligence is significantly and positively related to the use of collaborative and compromising conflict resolution strategies.

Research Question 3: To what extent does emotional intelligence affect the effectiveness of counselling practices?

Counselling Effectiveness	Variable Correlation with EI (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Managing client emotions	0.73	0.000	Strong positive relationship
Building therapeutic relationships	0.69	0.000	Strong positive relationship
Problem-solving in sessions	0.64	0.000	Moderate-strong positive

High emotional intelligence significantly enhances counselling effectiveness across multiple dimensions.

Research Question 4: What is the level of integration of emotional intelligence training in professional development programs?

Item	Yes (%)	No (%)
Have you received formal training on EI?	36%	64%
Is EI included in your professional development?	29%	71%
Would you like training in emotional intelligence?	88%	12%

Majority of the respondents have not received formal EI training, indicating a gap in professional development.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result	Decision
H_{01}	ANOVA	$F(2,147) = 4.76, p < 0.05$	Rejected

H_{02}	Pearson Correlation	r = 0.68, p = 0.000	Rejected
H_{03}	Pearson Correlation	r = 0.73, p = 0.000	Rejected
H_{04}	t-test	t(136) = 3.29, p = 0.001	Rejected

The table shows that all the null hypotheses were rejected, indicating statistically significant results. Specifically, the ANOVA result suggests significant differences among groups, while the Pearson correlation results (r = 0.68 and r = 0.73) indicate strong positive relationships between the variables. Additionally, the t-test result confirms a significant difference between the compared groups.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study have provided valuable insights into how emotional intelligence (EI) influences conflict resolution and counselling effectiveness in educational and public institutions within Owerri Municipal Council. The discussion is organized according to the research questions and hypotheses.

Level of Emotional Intelligence among Respondents

The results indicated that the counsellors in Owerri Municipal Council exhibited a generally high level of emotional intelligence, particularly in self-awareness, empathy, and relationship management. This aligns with previous research by Adeyemo and Ogunyemi (2020) and Oginska-Bulik (2020) who found that professionals with higher EI levels are better equipped to manage their own emotions and understand those of others, which is essential in emotionally charged situations like conflict resolution and counselling. This high EI level, however, contrasts with the finding that most participants had not received formal EI training, suggesting that much of their emotional competence may stem from personal experiences or informal learning. This points to a need for institutionalized emotional intelligence training to further strengthen these natural capacities.

Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Conflict Resolution Strategies

The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between emotional intelligence and the use of collaborative and compromising conflict resolution strategies. Respondents with higher EI scores were more likely to resolve disputes constructively by engaging in open communication, empathy, and mutual understanding. This confirms earlier empirical studies, such as Afolabi (2021) and Ugoani (2016), which demonstrated that emotionally intelligent individuals tend to avoid aggressive or avoidant conflict styles, preferring instead to seek win-win outcomes. The low

mean score for avoidant strategies among participants further supports the conclusion that EI encourages active engagement in resolving disputes rather than withdrawing or escalating tensions.

Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Counselling Effectiveness

A significant positive relationship was found between emotional intelligence and key indicators of counselling effectiveness, including empathy, emotional regulation, and client engagement. This supports the work of Ofole and Odusanya (2019) and Nelson et al. (2020), who emphasized the importance of EI in building trust, understanding client needs, and creating a therapeutic environment conducive to problem-solving. The results suggest that counsellors with higher emotional intelligence are better able to: Build rapport with clients/students, Navigate emotionally intense conversations, Guide clients toward realistic and emotionally sound decisions. This finding underscores the role of EI not just in conflict prevention, but also in therapeutic intervention and rehabilitation.

Integration of Emotional Intelligence Training

Despite the high levels of EI observed, the majority of participants reported that they had not undergone formal emotional intelligence training, and that EI concepts were not well integrated into professional development programs. However, a large percentage expressed interest in receiving such training, indicating a gap in institutional capacity building and a willingness to improve. This is consistent with findings by Eze and Eze (2019), who reported that structured EI training significantly improves interpersonal skills and conflict resolution outcomes among school personnel. The lack of formal training may limit the potential of otherwise capable counsellors, especially in more complex conflict or crisis situations.

Counselling Implications

The results of this study have several implications for counselling practice in Owerri Municipal and beyond:

Effective counselling practice requires deliberate and sustained investment in the emotional intelligence of professionals. Counsellors should be provided with structured and continuous training that equips them to understand and manage the emotional complexities that arise in client interactions and conflict situations. Beyond in-service training, emotional intelligence should be embedded as a core component of counsellor education programmes so that emerging professionals enter the field with a solid emotional and interpersonal foundation.

In addition, attention must be given to cultural sensitivity. Counsellors need to be adequately prepared to recognize how cultural beliefs, values, and social norms shape emotional expression and influence approaches to conflict resolution within the Nigerian context. This understanding will enable them to respond more appropriately and effectively to clients from diverse backgrounds. Institutional support is also essential. Schools, government agencies, and

counselling centres have a responsibility to create enabling environments by investing in emotional intelligence training and providing the necessary support systems for counsellors to perform optimally. When such support is in place, counsellors are better positioned to build strong therapeutic relationships characterized by trust, empathy, and openness, which ultimately leads to

more positive counselling outcomes.

Conclusion

This study underscores the central importance of emotional intelligence in promoting effective conflict resolution and counselling practice among counsellors in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State. Rather than merely describing outcomes, the study establishes emotional intelligence as a critical factor that shapes how counsellors respond to interpersonal challenges, manage emotions, and facilitate positive change in others. It highlights that the ability to understand and regulate emotions, demonstrate empathy, and maintain healthy relationships is fundamental to achieving meaningful and lasting resolutions in conflict situations.

Furthermore, the study affirms that emotional intelligence goes beyond being an individual trait; it is a professional competence that directly impacts the quality of counselling services and organizational harmony. Counsellors who demonstrate strong emotional intelligence are better equipped to create supportive environments, encourage open communication, and guide individuals toward constructive behavioural outcomes. Therefore, the study concludes that strengthening emotional intelligence among counsellors is essential for improving counselling effectiveness, fostering peaceful coexistence, and enhancing overall institutional functioning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to improve conflict resolution and counselling effectiveness through the application of emotional intelligence within Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State:

- Although counsellors showed a high level of emotional intelligence, targeted training should be provided to improve self-regulation and relationship management skills.
- Counsellors and public officials should be trained to adopt more collaborative and compromising strategies, as these are positively influenced by emotional intelligence.
- Emotional intelligence should be strengthened as a core professional skill to enhance counsellors' ability to manage client emotions, build relationships, and solve problems effectively.
- Emotional intelligence training should be formally incorporated into professional development programmes, since many respondents have not received such training despite its importance.

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PRE-AND POST-MARITAL COUNSELLING AS A PANACEA FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG NEWLY MARRIED ADULTS IN UMUAHIA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ABIA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined Pre- and Post-Marital Counselling as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution among Newly Married Adults in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Two research questions guided the study. The study targeted a population of 1,200 newly adults (within 1–5 years of marriage). A sample of 30 couples were selected using simple random sampling with gender-based stratification to ensure balanced representation. Data were collected using a researcher-designed instrument titled Pre- and Post-Marital Counselling Questionnaire (PPCQ) with eight items with a reliability index of 0.70. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions. Findings revealed that pre-marital counselling significantly helps couples to set realistic expectations, build effective communication skills, and anticipate possible sources of conflict, while post-marital counselling serves as an effective remedial tool for addressing marital challenges and promoting harmony. The study concluded that both pre- and post-marital counselling are indispensable for reducing marital conflicts and strengthening the stability of marriages.

It was recommended, among others, that pre-marital counselling should be made compulsory before marriage solemnization, and that accessible post-marital counselling services should be established to help couples manage conflicts constructively.

Keywords: Pre-marital counselling, Post-marital counselling, Conflict resolution, Newly married adults and Marital stability.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important social institutions in every society. It establishes the foundation for family life, provides social continuity, and nurtures the emotional and

psychological well-being of partners. However, marriage also comes with challenges. Newly married couples often face difficulties in adjusting to one another's values, habits, and expectations. Conflicts may arise from issues such as finances, communication gaps, sexual relations, childbearing, in-law interference, career priorities, and role performance within the household. If not effectively managed, such conflicts can escalate into chronic marital dissatisfaction, separation, or divorce (World Health Organization, 2020). This reality has raised

increasing concern among scholars, religious leaders, and counsellors on the need for structured interventions that can equip couples with the skills to manage their marital relationships successfully.

One of the most effective interventions recommended by scholars and practitioners is marital counselling. Counselling provides couples with a safe space to understand their differences, improve communication, and develop problem-solving skills (Elegbede *et al.,* 2024). It also helps them to build tolerance, patience, and emotional intelligence in their marital interactions. According to Angolo and Obida, (2020) counselling can be offered at different stages of marriage, particularly before marriage (pre-marital counselling) and after marriage (post-marital counselling). Pre-marital counselling seeks to prepare intending couples for marriage by addressing expectations, values, communication styles, conflict resolution techniques, and readiness for marital responsibilities. Post-marital counselling, on the other hand, is more remedial in nature, as it helps couples already in marriage to navigate real-life challenges, resolve ongoing disputes, and rebuild trust and intimacy where it is threatened (Ofoegbu & Chukwu, 2020).

In Nigeria, and particularly in Abia State, the rising cases of marital conflict and increasing rates of separation and divorce highlight the urgent need for marital counselling. Traditionally, marital conflicts were often managed within the family system, through the intervention of elders, kinsmen, or religious leaders. While these informal structures still play a role, modern challenges such as economic hardship, urban migration, shifting gender roles, and exposure to diverse cultural influences have made conflicts more complex and less amenable to traditional methods alone (Aliero, 2021). As a result, professional counselling both pre and post-marital has become more relevant than ever in addressing the unique needs of couples.

The significance of focusing on newly married couples lies in the fact that the early years of marriage are often the most delicate and formative. Couples are still adjusting to shared responsibilities, establishing communication patterns, and negotiating their roles in the relationship. Conflicts that arise during this stage, if left unresolved, may set negative precedents that affect the stability and longevity of the marriage (Akindahunsi, 2022). Therefore, introducing couples to structured counselling interventions at both the pre- and post-marital stages can be a powerful tool in preventing unnecessary conflict and promoting marital harmony.

Despite its potential, marital counselling is not always fully embraced in many Nigerian

communities, including Umuahia North Local Government Area. Askarshahi, *et al.,* (2025) is of the view that Factors such as cultural beliefs, stigma attached to counselling, reliance on traditional authority figures, and limited access to professional counsellors may limit the uptake of pre- and post-marital counselling. Nonetheless, where it is practiced, these studies Agboola and Adeoye (2018), Amadi (2021) and Okorie (2019), show that couples who participate in counselling show better conflict management, improved communication, and higher marital

satisfaction compared to those who do not.

This study therefore sought to explore pre- and post-marital counselling as a panacea for conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. It examined the effectiveness of counselling interventions in reducing marital conflicts, identified the common strategies employed during counselling, and highlighted the extent to which counselling influences marital satisfaction and stability. By doing so, the research will contribute to the understanding of how counselling can serve as a preventive and corrective mechanism in strengthening marriages in the local context.

Ultimately, the study underscored the idea that a stable and fulfilling marriage is not a product of chance, but of deliberate efforts by couples to learn, unlearn, and re-learn how to relate effectively with one another. Counselling, both before and after marriage, stands as a vital instrument for guiding couples through this process, making it a true panacea for conflict resolution in marital life.

Statement of the Problem

Marriage is expected to provide companionship, emotional support, and social stability for couples. However, for many newly married couples, the early years of marriage are often marked by challenges that test the strength of their union. Issues such as poor communication, unrealistic expectations, financial stress, cultural interference from in-laws, sexual incompatibility, and disagreements over household responsibilities frequently lead to conflict. In Nigeria, and particularly in Umuahia North Local Government Area, such conflicts have contributed to rising cases of marital instability, separation, and divorce, which negatively affect not only the couples but also the larger society.

Traditionally, marital conflicts in Igbo communities were managed through the intervention of family elders, kinsmen, or religious leaders. While these methods remain relevant, the complexities of modern marriage shaped by economic hardship, urbanization, shifting gender roles, and individualism demand more systematic and professional approaches. Unfortunately, many couples still enter into marriage without the benefit of adequate pre-marital preparation, and those who encounter difficulties are often reluctant to seek post-marital counselling due to stigma, lack of awareness, or limited access to trained counsellors. This gap has left many marriages vulnerable to persistent conflicts and breakdown.

It is against this background that the present study examined pre- and post-marital

counselling as a panacea for conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. The study established structured counselling interventions that can help couples resolve conflicts, promote marital satisfaction, and strengthen family stability in the local context.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of pre- and post-marital counselling as a panacea for conflict resolution among newly married adults in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following:

1. To assess the impact of pre-marital counselling on conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North.
2. To determine the impact of post-marital counselling on marital satisfaction among newly married couples in Umuahia North.

Research Questions

1. How does pre-marital counselling influence conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North?
2. In what ways does post-marital counselling contribute to marital satisfaction among newly married couples in Umuahia North?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data from a sample of newly married couples and counsellors in order to describe and analyze their views on the impacts of pre- and post-marital counselling in resolving conflicts. The target population for this study consisted of all newly married couples (1–5 years of marriage) residing in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State, estimated at 1,200 couples (2,400 individuals) based on marriage registry. A sample was drawn from the target population using simple random sampling technique to ensure equal representation of couples across different communities in Umuahia North. Stratification was applied based on gender (husbands and wives) to ensure balanced representation. 60 respondents (husbands and wives) were sampled for the study.

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled Pre- and Post-Marital Counselling Questionnaire (PPCQ) with eight items. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Guidance and Counselling and Educational Psychology in Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike Abia State, to ensure its clarity, relevance, and adequacy. Out of the 343 questionnaires distributed, 330 were properly filled and returned, representing a 96.2% return rate, which was considered adequate for the study. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study which was conducted with 10 couples outside the study area. The reliability of the

instrument was determined using the test-retest method, and the reliability coefficient of 0.70 was calculated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation.

The researchers administered the questionnaires personally with the assistance of trained research assistants to ensure a high response rate and to clarify any misunderstandings.Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions and chi-square to test

the hypotheses.

Results

Research Question 1: How does pre-marital counselling influence conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North?

Table 1: *Respondents' views on the influence of pre-marital counselling on conflict resolution*

SN	ITEM	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Decision
1	Pre-marital counselling helped us set realistic expectations	3.52	0.65	Agreed
2	It improved our communication and understanding	3.47	0.70	Agreed
3	It prepared us to manage financial disagreements	3.32	0.81	Agreed
4	It reduced the level of conflict in our marriage	3.10	0.95	Agreed
	Cluster Mean	3.36	0.67	Agreed

Data in Table 1 show that the mean responses (all above 2.50 benchmark) show that respondents agreed pre-marital counselling plays a significant role in conflict resolution among newly married couples.

Research Question 2: In what ways does post-marital counselling contribute to marital satisfaction and stability among newly married couples in Umuahia North?

Table 3: *Respondents' views on the contribution of post-marital counselling*

SN	Item	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Decision
5	Post-marital counselling helped us resolve conflicts effectively.	3.20	0.80	Agreed
6	It improved emotional intimacy and understanding.	3.00	0.90	Agreed
7	Counselling reduced thoughts of separation/divorce.	2.40	1.10	Agreed
8	It enhanced our overall marital satisfaction.	3.45	0.70	Agreed
	Cluster Mean	**3.13**	**0.52**	**Agreed**

Data in Table 3 indicate that respondents agreed that post-marital counselling contributes positively to marital stability and satisfaction among newly married couples in Umuahia North.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis revealed that pre-marital counselling significantly influences conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North. Respondents agreed that pre-marital

counselling helped them set realistic expectations, improve communication, manage finances, and reduce conflicts in their marriages. This supports the work of Elegbede *et al*., (2024), who asserted that pre-marital counselling equips couples with preventive skills that reduce marital stress and misunderstandings. Similarly, the finding aligns with Agboola and Adeoye (2018), who noted that couples who undergo pre-marital counselling report lower levels of conflict compared to those who did not. The implication is that equipping couples with knowledge before marriage provides a strong foundation for stability.

Results further indicated that post-marital counselling significantly enhances marital satisfaction and stability. Respondents noted that counselling helped them resolve conflicts effectively, improved emotional intimacy, and reduced thoughts of separation or divorce. This is in line with the findings of Okorie (2019), who observed that post-marital counselling serves as an intervention strategy that helps couples address ongoing challenges. Similarly, Ofoegbu and Chukwu (2020) emphasized that counselling sessions provide a safe environment for couples to air grievances and develop healthier coping mechanisms. The implication is that post-marital counselling does not only address conflicts but also reinforces marital bonds and satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study examined Pre- and Post-Marital Counselling as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution among Newly Married Couples in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. Based on the analysis, it was concluded that both pre- and post-marital counselling play significant roles in promoting marital harmony, stability, and satisfaction. Pre-marital counselling helps couples set realistic expectations, develop communication skills, and anticipate possible challenges, while post-marital counselling serves as a remedial tool for resolving conflicts and strengthening emotional bonds. Together, they provide a dual framework that equips couples with preventive and corrective strategies for marital success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Religious institutions, marriage registries, and community leaders should make pre-marital counselling compulsory before solemnization of marriages. This will ensure that couples enter into marriage with adequate preparation and realistic expectations.
2. Counsellors, churches, and family life educators should create accessible post-marital counselling programs where couples can seek help in times of conflict. This can be achieved through periodic marriage seminars, workshops, and professional counselling services.

3. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in Abia State should collaborate with professional counsellors to design family stability programs that emphasize the importance of counselling as a preventive and remedial measure.
4. Media outlets and community-based organizations should be engaged to sensitize couples on the benefits of both pre- and post-marital counselling in achieving stable marriages.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND EMPATHY AS PREDICTORS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND AFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ABIA STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated effective communication and empathy as predictors of conflict resolution and affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State. The study adopted correlational research design. Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select the sample of 400 SS2 students from the population of 29077 students in Abia State. The researcher developed three research instruments for data collection titled; Effective Communication Questionnaire (ECQ), Empathy Questionnaire (EQ) and Affective Engagement Questionnaire (AEQ). The instruments were face validated by three experts, two from Department of Guidance and Counselling (Educational Psychology Unit) and one from Science Education Department (Measurement and Evaluation Unit) respectively all from MOUAU. The reliability of the three instruments were determined using Cronbach Alpha Method which yielded reliability values of 0.80 for the ECQ, 0.84 for the EEIQ and 0.75 for SEQ respectively. The instruments were administered to the students through the help of three research assistants. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was used to answer the research questions, while linear regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that effective communication significantly predicted affective engagement among students in Abia State as it negatively predicted 88.0% of the variance observed in affective engagement of students in Abia State. Empathy predicted 52.2% of the affective engagement of students in Abia State. Among others it was recommended that teachers should establish feedback mechanisms that allow students to express their thoughts and feelings so as to meet their communication needs.

Keywords: Effective communication, empathy, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, affective engagement and senior secondary school students.

Introduction

In today's complex and dynamic society, senior secondary school students are constantly faced with conflicts and challenges that could have the potential of impacting their psychological well-being, social interaction, academic achievement and behavioural engagement. This is because they are different people coming from different homes with their different experiential

backgrounds and psychological makeups such as interests, attitudes, aptitudes, abilities, capabilities, potentials, strengths and weaknesses. As a result, their mechanisms for conflict resolutions and affective engagement in the school may differ.

Conflict resolution as conceptualized by Mailchimps (2025), is the process utilized by two or more parties to find a cordial solution to a problem. Similarly, American Management Association (2023), saw conflict resolution as a way to resolve an issue or problem between two or more people. Conflict resolution is the process of ending a dispute and reaching an agreement that satisfies all persons involved. Since conflict is an essential part of being human, effective conflict resolution is not designed to avoid disagreements. Instead, conflict resolution skills are used to facilitate discussions, increase understanding and control emotional responses (Jacob, 2022). Accordingly, Shonk (2025), opined that conflict resolution can be defined as the informal or formal process that two or more individuals adopt to find a peaceful solution to their dispute.

In the context of this paper, conflict resolution is a process whereby students resolve issues and concerns that could affect their academic achievement and behavioural engagement in the school. Conflicts are natural among senior secondary school students hence they shouldn't try to avoid. Instead they should work on their conflict resolution skills. Having good conflict resolution skills means they can resolve issues among themselves while still maintaining a healthy relationship to a problem or dispute in a positive way and still maintain a healthy and happy relationship with the other individuals involved.

Conflict resolution is important for maintaining healthy student teacher and student-student relationship. Strong conflict resolution skills help resolve disputes positively and maintain respectful and trusting relationships. According to Mailchimps (2025), important conflict resolution skills include active listening, open communication, avoiding blame, staying calm, and collaboration. According to the author, conflict resolution strategies include; negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and litigation could be helpful in managing conflicts effectively. Consequently, effective conflict resolution among senior secondary school students could lead to behavioural engagement among students.

Behavioural engagement is an aspect of school engagement that could be easily observed in the students' willingness to participate in the teaching and learning activities. affective engagement which entails the student emotional responses to learning activities including the exhibition of positive or negative attitudes and reactions towards schooling, academic activities, non-academic activities, teachers and classmates. It involves reactions, students show to the school and individuals in the school. It involves students' participation in the academic and extra-

curricular activities of the school (Fredrick *et al* in Estevez *et al* 2021). Students with high level of affective engagement according to Srikrishna (2025), demonstrate dedication to their studies, and academic absorption leading to high academic achievement and better academic adjustment and learning experiences. A high level of hehavioural engagement is related to motivation, perseverance and a sense of accomplishment, all which lead to student overall well-being.

Students with high level of affective engagement actively participate in the teaching and learning process as well as in other extra-curricular activities of the school due to their positive attitude towards schooling and learning experiences. Conversely, students with low level of affective engagement experience burnout, stress and decreased metal health (Srikrishna, 2025). Fredrick's *et al* (2019) identified. The affectively disengaged are the emotionally disengaged students who exhibit a negative attitude and reaction towards school and individuals in the school such as teachers and classmates.

Affective engagement is important in the overall development and academic achievement of secondary school students. According to Kizildag *et al* (2017), when the students are engaged in the school, they have positive feelings that contribute to their academic life by providing more positive school life. As noted by Barragan Martin *et al* (2021) high level of affective school engagement among students improve their competencies, skills and values required for academic excellence, it also reduces students' participation in negative behaviours while enabling them, to make a smooth transition to adulthood. Owolabi and Owolabi (2024), emphasized that student engagement contributes towards their tendency to retain academics knowledge as well as complete their programmes at record time. According to the authors, when the students are actively engaged in the school, they acquire experiential knowledge both in planned and unplanned learning programmes. Zhen *et al* in Lofti and Ashouri (2022), added that school engagement provides an obvious picture of the students' academic progress and failure. This may be true when the students engage in the educational process beginning from teaching and learning and progress to evaluation and feedback from the student's. In the assertions of DeToro *et al* (2023), when students are engaged, they perceive learning and school activities as meaningful, they become motivated and show sustained commitment towards their learning and future. Hence, they see schooling as being worthwhile and become fully involved into all the processes involved.

From the above discussions, it could be deduced that affective school engagement is important in the sense that it enables the students to actively participate in the school programmes which could impact their academic achievements and overall developments, especially when they exhibit a positive attitude towards schooling and learning experiences. The ultimate purpose of education is geared towards helping the students to achieve all round development and behaviour modification. However, the realization of the above aim of education may not be possible without students' active engagement in the school's academic and non-academic activities. As a cited in Michael and Michelle (2025), researches conducted by (Dyer 2015; Lie *et al* 2018; Rechmeyer 2019; Maamin *et al* (2022), and Mele 2020), all indicated a positive relationship between students

engagement and their academic achievement as well as their overall well-being. The numerous importance and impact of school engagement in the overall well-being and academic achievements of students, highlight the need to pay attention in the education of senior secondary school students

Senior secondary school students are learners usually within the age range of 16 and18 who

are in their final years of secondary education. According to Bridges (2017), a secondary school student is regarded as an individual enrolled in educational institutions offering secondary education programmes either scientific, humanistic or technical subjects to equip them for university education or labour market. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014), as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (NPE), senior secondary education is a post basic education children receive after a successful completion of Basic Education and passing the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and Junior Arabic and Islamic Studies Certificate Examinations (JAISCE). In the views of Okeke *et al* (2024), secondary education is an important tier in the hierarchy of Nigerian Educational System and the form of education students receive after their primary education. Operationally, secondary education is a form of education students receive in an educational institution that succeeds primary education and precedes tertiary education. It focuses on equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and values required for active participation in the society.

In today's Nigerian secondary school educational system, students seem to have poor or low level of affective engagement. Researchers like (Lara *et al* 2021; DeToro *et al* 2023; and Saracostti *et al* 2019) have pointed out some of the factors that could have led to poor or low affective engagement among senior secondary school students to include, lack of peer support, lack of family support, lack of teacher support, unchallenging curriculum contents, unconducive learning environment, lack of meaningful feedback, inadequate infrastructural facilities, limited opportunities to participate in school activities and inability to resolve conflicts among them. The researchers also added that such personal factors like learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and external stressors all affects students engagement in the school. To emphasize more on teacher factor, when there is no cordial relationship between the teacher and the students or between the learner and the students or between the learners and his classmates, there could be existence of lack of trust that could give rise to conflict and low school engagement among senior secondary school students especially in Abia State.

Over the years, the researchers' observed that a greater percentage of senior secondary school students in Abia State avoid classes and other school programmes and activities. Instead of actively involving themselves in the curriculum and extracurricular activities of the school to achieve all round development, one could see them roaming around the school premises, hanging under the trees, hiding inside the bushes, clinging to their mobile phones and using it to commit all sort of internet frauds and cybercrimes. Most of the students use their cell phones to engage in sport betting, whatsapping and facebooking, while some watch nudes during school hours instead

of participating in the school programmes. Most students have negative attitude towards schooling, they hardly attend classes, do their assignments, and write tests or examinations. Many of them believe that education is a scam. Due to peer pressure, most of them became addicted to the internet watching all these popular celebrities and online influencers instead of engaging in their school programmes. Most students go extra mile to see them as their role models without

knowing the true source of their wealth and popularities. The issues of materialism and get rich quick syndrome are really pushing students away from engaging in school programmes, most of them have poor orientation about academic achievement and do not know the direct and indirect effect this poor or low level of school engagement may have on their academic achievement.

For instance, in 2020 as noted by Eke (2023), Abia State recorded a 73.4% pass rate in JAMB examination with 43,857 candidates sitting for the exam. According to the author, Abia obtained a 91.4% pass rate in NECO SSCE surpassing the national average of 73.2%, in 2019 the State recorded 89.3% and 88.2% pass rates in NECO exams. Also in 2020 WAEC SSCE, Abia recorded, 75.2% pass rate in the core subject of English and Mathematics and at least three other subjects. Significantly the above performance is higher than the national average of 59.2%. Eke (2023), further explained that Abia State has produced some of the best students in Nigeria with most of the students from the State scoring all A's in WAEC and SSCE. For instance, in 2020, a student from Abia State emerged among the top performing students in the country having scored A's in all the nine subjects.

Despite Abia State's impressive performance in national examinations as agued by Eke (2023), Abia State students find it challenging to gain admission into tertiary institutions. Eke quoting JAMB argued that out of 43,857 who sat for 2020 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), only 13,434 candidates from the State gained admission into tertiary institutions representing just 30.6% of the total candidates that sat for the exams. Significantly, this is lower than the national average of 40.2%. However authors like Okeoma, Unachukwu and Okeke (2024), attributed these impressive performances of students in external examinations especially in WAEC and NECO to the effect of miracle or special centres that allowed the students to engage in all sorts of examination malpractices after collecting huge amounts of money from them to settle the invigilators and exam monitors so that they could be allowed to cheat in the examination hall and pass very well. To curb examination malpractice and align Nigeria's education assessment with international digital standards, the Minister of Education Dr. Tunji Alausa declared that by May/June 2026, both WAEC and NECO examinations including essay, theory and objectives papers would be conducted on computer platforms (Ozibo, 2025). This transition to computer based is triggering a high level of anxiety and fear among senior secondary school students in Abia State especially the students who have made up their minds to engage in examination malpractice instead of actively engaging in the school's academic and non-academic activities for a higher academic achievement and all round development.

Considering the extent of low affective school engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State, several efforts have been made by the government, teachers and other

stake-holders in education to encourage high level of school engagement among students. For instance, Dr. Alex Chioma Otti, the current Governor of Abia State has taken several steps to improve school engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State, including lunching of the Abia Fostering Innovation and Reform for School Transformation (FIRST) Education Programme, investing in infrastructure, training and recruitment of teachers. Also, he

has hinted off discriminatory salary in favour of teachers in Abia State. The Governor explained that the incentive was to attract teachers to the school system and motivate them to engage the students.

Okeoma, Unachukwu and Okeke (2024), argued that in spite of all the teachers and governments effort to actively engage the students in the teaching and learning process for maximal success, most secondary school students lack the required affective engagement in their school programmes. As maintained by Mbanuzuru *et al* (2021), the evidence of low school engagement among senior secondary school students could be revealed in the students' poor study habit, inclination to cell phones, internet addiction, and lateness to school. However, this is directly or indirectly affecting the students' academic achievements. Consequently, Okeoma, Unachukwu and Okeke (2024), suggested that attention should be given to factors that could redirect senior secondary school students toward affective engagement in school programmes. However, some of the factors could be effective communication and emotional intelligence.

Effective communication is the process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, opinions, knowledge so that the message is clearly communicated by the sender and adequately received and understood by the receiver. According to Spencer-Oatey (2020), effective communication strategies are essential for academic adjustment enabling students to build a positive relationship with peers, teachers, navigate academic demands and seek support when needed. Haiilo (2025), was of the view that every effective communication plan should clearly include three important factors that directly impact the success of the strategy. These factors include; the audience, the message, and the channel through which communication is sent to the receiver. In the view of Jacob (2023), communication strategies are divided into three categories: non-verbal, verbal and visual. Verbal communication can be done through oral or written. Non-verbal communication strategy consists of non-verbal cues like facial expressions, voice tone or body language. Visual communication on its own uses pictorial interpretation or web pages to communicate. Coursera Staff (2025), added that communication can occur in person, on internet (on forums, social media and websites), over the phone (through apps, calls, and video), or by mail. Some of the benefits of effective communication in an individual's personal life as identified by Coursera Staff (2025) include; improved social, emotional and mental health deeper connection with people, new bonds based on trust and transparency, better problem solving and conflict resolution skills. The seven C's of effective communication as identified by Mindtools Content Team (2025) are; clear, concise, concrete, correct, coherent, complete, and courteous. In the context of this study, effective communication strategy is the ability of students to communicate clearly, listen actively

and empathize with others. Research conducted by Komarraju and Karau (2015) indicated that effective communication played a significant role in promoting school engagement. According to the researchers, such effective communication strategies include; active listening and clear expression which also enabled students to build a positive relationships with peers and teachers. Also, Hativa (2013), found that students who possess effective communication skills have conflict

resolution skills for a better school engagement. Shan *et al* (2018), reported that when teachers create a sense of community, respond to students and foster positive relationships, students are more engaged and enthusiastic about learning and tend to perform better academically. In this study, another factor that was considered to have the potential of repositioning senior secondary school students towards affective school engagement is emotional intelligence.

In the notions of Gkintoni *et al* (2025), emotional intelligence is an individual's capacity to effectively comprehend, regulate and harness emotions in both one of others in a constructive manner for the benefit of self and others. It thus helps to foster a loving, supporting and productive educational environment that could facilitate school engagement among the students Goleman (1995), who popularized the Salovery and Mayer's theory of emotional intelligence identified five major components of emotional intelligence as; self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. However, this study focused on determining the extent empathy in emotional intelligence could predict conflict resolution and affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

As described by Iwuchukwu (2025), empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Iwuchukwu further argued that it goes beyond sympathy which is just acknowledging another person's feelings. According to Drigas and Papousti (2018), empathy is the ability to recognize another person's State of emotion and why they are in such emotional State. In a similar vein, Cherry (2023), saw empathy as the tendency to recognize the feelings of others and view things from their own perspective. Block Leadership (2022), simply referred to empathy as "I sense your pain" Accordingly, students who are emotionally intelligent walk in another person's shoes to know what the person is going through so as to understand the person better. A person who is emotionally intelligent can easily distinguish between genuine and fake emotions. Empathy helps the students to be sympathetic to other persons needs and feelings genuinely. A student who lacks this skill does not really understand how other people are feeling, they may not also understand how their emotional responses could affect others. As a result, they could be in constant conflict with their peers and teachers in the school. Empathy as cited in Anuri (2025), involves two components; cognitive empathy which focused on cognitively perspective taking and affective empathy which focused on emotional sharing. Affective empathy could lead to affective school engagement among senior secondary school students.

In the context of this study, empathy is the ability of the students to understand other students from their internal frame of reference which is usually reflected in the way they understand and share their emotions in the exact way it affect them. Empathy is important in education in the

sense that it helps the students to manage academic stress and engage actively in the school programmes. Furthermore; Garandea *et al* (2021) observed that empathy plays an important role in promoting positive mental health and emotional well-being among students. When students feel valued and understood by their peers, it reduces feelings of isolation and enhances their sense of belonging. This invariably improves affective school engagement among secondary school

students. Previous researchers have found out that empathy reduces negative behaviours, improves students' engagements, academic achievement and their overall well-being (see Burton, 2023; Iwuchukwu, 2025; Amiri, 2025; Bernil, 2024). Also; Jenaabadi (2025), observed that empathy training affected the student's resilience, self-efficacy and school engagement. As a result, there is the need to help students build their skill of empathy. Cherry (2023), outlined the following ways to help students to build their empathy; being willing to share their feelings among their peers, engaging in school programmes, listening to others, talking to new people, practicing loving kindness meditation, trying to envisage himself in someone else's shoes. Consequently, by practicing all these ways, students do not only build their empathy skill, hence they would also build their communication or social skills that would help them towards resolving a conflict.

Effective communication and empathy in emotional intelligence are important in the student's affective school engagement as could be observed in the background literature. However, despite the importance within the researchers' knowledge, there is no study on Effective communication and empathy in emotional intelligence as predictors of conflict resolution and affective school engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia Consequently, it is against this background that the researcher intends to investigate effective communication and empathy in emotional intelligence as predictors of affective school engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal school setting, senior secondary school students in Abia State should exhibit a positive attitude towards school engagement characterized by active participation in academic and non-academic activities like attending to classes, concentrating in class, doing their class and home works, participating in school sports and guidance programmes, exhibit a positive attitude towards schooling, show strong motivation to learn and a sense of belonging to their school community. Students are supposed to possess conflict resolution skills such as effective communication. They are also expected to have developed empathy in emotional intelligence to enable them to get along with everyone and to affectively engage in the school programmes.

However, the current situation in most secondary schools in Abia State is worrisome. Many students exhibit low level of affective engagement marked by lateness to school, poor class attendance, poor academic performance, lack of motivation, disconnection from school activities, negative attitude towards schooling, learning, test, examination and learning experiences. Instead of active participation in school programmes to achieve all round development and high academic

achievement, one could see them engaging in non-school related and unhealthy activities such as risky sexual behaviours, cybercrime, internet fraud, sports betting, stealing, drug abuse, internet addiction and among others which could impact their academic achievement. Due to fear of failure, one could see them engaging in all sorts of examination misconducts and malpractices such as cheating, copying and use of phone in the exam hall just to pass their examinations.

However, some of the factors that could have led to students poor school engagement may include; poor facilitates, negative attitude of the teachers, poor teaching strategies, unchallenging curriculum contents and lack of enriched environment. Again, most students lack effective communication and empathy skills which results to constant conflict and low level of affective engagement in the school. All these may subsequently lead to poor academic achievement and even school drop-out among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

However, the gap between the ideal situation and the current realities among senior secondary school students in Abia State highlights the need to investigate Effective communication and empathy in emotional intelligence as predictors of conflict resolution and affective school engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia Notwithstanding the importance of the study, within the researcher's knowledge, there is a scarcity of research in this area especially within the context of senior secondary school students in Abia State. The gap in research thus highlights the need to investigate effective communication and empathy in emotional intelligence as predictors of conflict resolution and affective school engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

Purpose of the study

— The purpose of the study was to investigate effective communication and empathy as predictors of conflict resolution and affective school engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia. Specifically, the study sought to;

— Examine the extent effective communication predict affective engagement among students.

— Investigate the extent empathy in emotional intelligence predict affective engagement among students.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What is the extent effective communication predict affective engagement among students?
2. To what extent does empathy in emotional intelligence predict affective engagement among students?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

♦ Effective communication does not significantly predict affective engagement among students.

♦ There is no significance prediction between empathy in emotional intelligence and affective engagement among students.

Methodology

Correlational research design was utilized for the study. According to Nworgu (2015), the

main focus of correlational research design is on establishing the relationship between two or more variables. The population of the study consisted of all Senior Secondary School Two (SS2) students in the Government Secondary Schools in all the three education zones of Abia State. The Available statistics indicated that there are a total number of 29077 (13,168 males and 15,891 females) SS2 students in Abia State (Planning Research Statistics Department, Secondary Education Management Board Headquarters Umuahia, Abia State 2025). Multi-stage sampling techniques were adopted to select the sample size of 400 SS2 students in Abia State. The researcher developed three research instruments for data collection. The instruments were titled: Effective Communication Questionnaire (ECQ), Empathy in Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (EEIQ) and Affective Engagement Questionnaire (AEQ) The three instruments consisted of ten (10) questionnaire items, structured on a four point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4 points, High Extent (HE) = 3 points, Low Extent (LE) = 2 points and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1 point respectively. The instruments were face validated by three experts, two from the Department of Guidance and Counselling (Educational Psychology Unit) and one from Science Education Department (Measurement and Evaluation Unit) respectively all from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The internal consistency reliability of the three instruments were determined using Cronbach Alpha Method. The instruments had reliability coefficients of 0.80 for the ECQ, 0.84 for the EEIQ and 0.75 for SEQ respectively. The instruments were administered to the students using direct delivery and recovery approach through the help of three (3) research assistants. All the copies of the questionnaires were returned. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was used to answer the research questions, while linear regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results from the data analyzed were presented in line with research questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

Research Question 1

What is the extent effective communication predict affective engagement among students?

Table 1: *Correlation Matrix of effective communication as a predictor of affective engagement senior secondary school students*

Source		**EC.**	**AESSS**
EC.	Pearson Correlation	1	-.943*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

	N	400	400
	Pearson Correlation	-.943*	1
AESSS	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	400	210
	R^2	.880	

EC = Effective Communication, AESSS = Affective Engagement of Secondary School Students Adjustment of In-school Adolescents.
**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Data in Table 1 indicate a correlation coefficient (r) of -.943 which is negative and within the coefficient limit of ± 0.81-1.00. This reveals that effective communication predicts affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State to a very high negative extent. The coefficient of determination (R^2) .880 indicates that 88.0% of the variance observed in the affective engagement of students was accounted for by effective communication. Therefore, effective communication negatively predicted 88.0% of the variance observed in the affective engagement of senior secondary school students in in Abia State.

Hypothesis 1: Effective communication does not significantly predict affective engagement among students.

Table 2: *Linear Regression Analysis of Effective Communication and Affective Engagement among Students.*

Source	**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Squares**	**F**	**Sig.**
Regression	218.322	1	218.322	110.319	.000
Residual	1185.178	599	1.979		
Total	1403.500	400			

Data in Table 2 showed that effective communication significantly predicted affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State. The calculated f-value of 110.319 in respect of the relationship between effective communication and affective engagement among senior secondary school students is higher than f-critical of 1.96 with degree of freedom of

1 and 599 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis that States effective communication does not significantly predict affective engagement among students. Consequently, effective communication significantly predicted affective engagement among students.

Research question 2: To what extent does empathy in emotional intelligence predict affective engagement among students?

Table 3: *Correlation Matrix of Empathy in Emotional Intelligence and Affective Engagement among Students.*

Source		EEI.	AESSS
EEI.	Pearson Correlation	1	-.724*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400
AESSS	Pearson Correlation	-.724*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	400	210
	R^2	.522	

EEI. = Empathy in Emotional Intelligence, AESSS = Affective Engagement among Secondary School Students

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Data in Table 3 indicated a correlation coefficient (r) of -.72 which is negative and within the coefficient limit of ± 0.61- 0.80. This indicated that empathy in emotional intelligence predicted affective engagement among senior secondary school students to a negatively high extent. The coefficient of determination (R^2) .522 indicated that 52.2% of the variance observed in affective engagement was accounted for by empathy in emotional intelligence. Consequently, empathy in emotional intelligence negatively predicted 52.2% of the affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significance prediction between empathy in emotional intelligence and affective engagement among students.

Table 4: *Linear Regression Analysis of Empathy in Emotional Intelligence and Affective Engagement among Students.*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Regression	257.612	1	257.612	52.822	.000
Residual	2916.153	598	4.877		
Total	3173.765	400			

Df= degree of freedom, F = F-calculated, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The data in Table 4 showed that empathy in emotional intelligence significantly predicted affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State. The calculated f-value of 52.822 in respect of the relationship between empathy in emotional intelligence and affective engagement among snior secondary school students is higher than f-critical value of 1.96 with degree of freedom of 1 and 598 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which State that there is no significance prediction between empathy in emotional intelligence and

affective engagement among students was rejected. Consequently, empathy in emotional intelligence significantly and negatively predicted affective engagement among students.

Discussion

The findings of the study indicated that effective communication significantly predicted affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State as it negatively predicted 88.0% of the variance observed in the academic adjustment of in-school adolescents' in Abia State. This is in agreement with the findings of earlier researchers. For instance, research conducted by Komarraju and Karau (2015) indicated that effective communication played a significant role in promoting school engagement. According to the researchers, such effective communication strategies include; active listening and clear expression which also enabled students to build a positive relationships with peers and teachers. Also, Hativa (2013), found that students who possess effective communication skills have conflict resolution skills for a better school engagement. Shan *et al* (2018), reported that when teachers create a sense of community, respond to students and foster positive relationships, students are more engaged and enthusiastic about learning and tend to perform better academically.

Furthermore, the findings of this research indicated that empathy in emotional intelligence negatively predicted 52.2% of the affective engagement of senior secondary school students in Abia State as it significantly predicted the affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State. This finding is in agreement with the findings of previous researchers who reported that empathy reduces negative behaviours, improves students' engagements, academic achievement and their overall well-being (see Amiri, 2025; Bernil, 2024; Burton, 2023; Iwuchukwu, 2025;). Also; Jenaabadi 2025 observed that empathy training affected the student's resilience, self-efficacy and affective school engagement. As a result, there is the need to help students build their skill of empathy. Cherry (2023), outlined the following ways to help students to build their empathy; being willing to share their feelings among their peers, engaging in school programmes, listening to others, talking to new people, practicing loving kindness meditation, trying to envisage himself in someone else's shoes. Consequently, by practicing all these ways, students do not only build their empathy skill, hence they would also build their communication or social skills that would help them towards resolving a conflict and at the same time develop a positive attitude towards school engagement.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that effective communication significantly predicted affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State as it negatively predicted 88.0% of the variance observed in the affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State. Empathy in emotional intelligence negatively predicted 52.2% of the affective engagement of senior secondary school students in

Abia State as it significantly predicted the affective engagement among senior secondary school students in Abia State.

Educational Implications

When educational institutions adopt a student centred approach, it would provide opportunities for students to express themselves, share their thoughts, and engage in discussions. This could help build confidence, promote effective communication and increase affective engagement among the senior secondary school students.

It is essential to incorporate empathy building activities into school curriculum to foster a supportive learning environment.

Recommendations

Teachers should establish feedback mechanisms that allow students to express their thoughts and feelings. Helping teachers to identify areas of improvements and at the same time tailor their teaching approaches to meet the student's communication needs.

Government should create an inclusive learning environment that promotes understanding, diversity and encourages free expression among the students.

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CORRELATES OF SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS ON PEER PRESSURE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE, ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE

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Abstract

Young people's decisions, actions and relationships with others are greatly influenced by peer pressure as it has a significant impact on university students' social and academic lives. One effective way to help students navigate peer pressure could be group counselling. This study examined the influence of socio-cultural factors on peer pressure among undergraduates at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB). A descriptive survey design was utilized for the study, the population comprised of all undergraduates of Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) and data was collected from 291 students across ten colleges using a structured questionnaire adapted from peer pressure scale by Palani and Mani (2016) and Ward and Kennedy's (1999) socio-cultural adaptation scale (SCAS) with a reliability coefficient of α = .73 and .79. respectively. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics (for socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents), while correlation, and regression analyses answered research questions one and two respectively. Findings revealed a significant negative relationship between socio-cultural factors (family structure, religious beliefs, community values, cultural expectations) and peer pressure. Regression analysis showed that all the sociocultural factors jointly accounted for 51.8% of the variance in peer pressure, with religious beliefs (β = -0.113) emerging as the most potent predictor.

The study recommended among others that institutions should facilitate peer mentorship and support groups that provide alternative positive social influences, reducing the dominance of negative peer pressure.

Keywords: Peer Pressure, Family structure, Religious beliefs, Community values and Cultural expectations.

Introduction

University life is a time of growth, learning, and self-discovery, but it also comes with its fair share of challenges, one of the most significant being peer pressure. Peer pressure is a powerful force in the lives of young people, shaping their choices, behaviours, and interactions with others. For university students, it plays a crucial role in their academic and social experiences. While peer influence can be positive motivating students to work harder, take on leadership roles, or engage in healthy activities it can also push individuals toward risky behaviours like substance abuse, academic dishonesty, or negative social habits (Aluko, Daramola & Omodehin, 2024).

Peer plays a very important role in the development of an individual's life (Scholte & Van Aken, 2020). Managing peer pressure effectively requires strategic interventions, including sociocultural factors and group counselling approaches. Peer pressure is influenced by factors such as social media, school, culture, and family expectations, making it challenging for students to balance academic and social responsibilities (Abbasi, 2025). The struggle between social acceptance and academic success can lead to anxiety, stress, and declining performance (Kedia & Kumar, 2025). Guidance counsellors must not only address peer influence but also help students manage thee motional and psychological impact of these pressures (Cobbina, 2025).

Beyond academics and behaviour, guidance counsellors shape students' personal development by fostering self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and decision-making skills (Ayeni et al., 2024). These skills empower students to resist negative influences, which is especially important in diverse school settings. Tailoring interventions to students' unique needs ensures counselling services remain inclusive an defective (Sakız & Jencius,2024). The success of guidance counselling in addressing peer pressure depends on collaboration between students, parents, teachers and counsellors. Schools must provide a supportive environment where students feel comfortable seeking help without fear of judgment. This study will examine the impact of some socio cultural factors like family structure, religious beliefs, community values, cultural expectations on peer pressure among undergraduates at FUNAAB, offering recommendations to strengthen partnerships between school staff, families and counsellors.

Family structure plays a critical role in shaping adolescents' and young adults' behaviour and their susceptibility to peer influence. A stable and supportive family provides emotional security, guidance and value orientation, which reduces the tendency to succumb to negative peer pressure.

Conversely, students from disrupted or less cohesive family structures (e.g., single-parent or divorced homes) may lack adequate parental supervision and are more likely to seek acceptance from peers, making them vulnerable to risky behaviours (Mahardika & Abisono, 2024). Research shows that family cohesion, communication, and parental monitoring act as protective factors against deviant peer influence (Booth & Shaw, 2023). Religious beliefs often serve as a moral compass that influences decision-making and behaviour. Students with strong religious values are

less likely to engage in behaviours promoted by negative peer groups, as their actions are guided by internalized doctrines and ethical standards (Estrada et al., 2019). Religious affiliation and participation in faith-based communities provide social support and accountability, which reduces the likelihood of yielding to peer pressure (Brock, 2022). However, weak or conflicting religious beliefs may increase vulnerability to external influences.

The community environment, including neighbourhood norms and collective values, significantly affects how students respond to peer influence. Communities that uphold pro-social values, discipline and collective responsibility help reduce susceptibility to negative peer pressure by reinforcing acceptable behaviours (Hibbin, 2024). Conversely, communities characterized by weak social norms, high crime rates, or permissiveness tend to expose youths to risky peer behaviours (Wang et al., 2019). Peer conformity often reflects the dominant values of the surrounding community. Cultural expectations dictate roles, behaviours and social standards, which influence how individuals interact with peers. In collectivist cultures, where group harmony is prioritized, students may experience pressure to conform to cultural norms or peer group standards, even if they conflict with personal values (Okunola & Ifyness, 2025). At the same time, strong cultural expectations emphasizing respect, responsibility and self-control can buffer against negative peer influence (Koekkoek, 2024). Therefore, cultural norms can both protect or amplify peer pressure depending on the nature of the expectations.

Despite growing scholarly attention to peer pressure among undergraduates, most existing studies have focused primarily on individual-level determinants such as personality traits, self-esteem, and emotional competence, with limited empirical attention to sociocultural correlates. Where socio-cultural factors have been examined, they are often treated broadly without disaggregating specific dimensions such as family structure, religious beliefs, community values, and cultural expectations. Moreover, few studies have contextualized these variables within public universities in Southwest Nigeria, particularly among undergraduates of the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Ogun State. This creates a contextual and conceptual gap in understanding how distinct socio-cultural factors uniquely and collectively influence peer pressure experiences in this population. The present study therefore seeks to fill this gap by examining the correlates of selected socio-cultural factors on peer pressure among undergraduates in this setting.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between socio-cultural factors and peer pressure among FUNAAB undergraduates?

2. What is the joint and relative contributions of socio-cultural factors to the prediction of peer pressure among FUNAAB undergraduates?

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate as it enables the researcher to collect data on socio-cultural factors, group counselling, and peer pressure

among students at FUNAAB. The survey method allows for the collection of primary data from respondents, providing a detailed understanding of their experiences and perspectives regarding peer pressure and the effectiveness of group counselling interventions. The population of this study consists of 21,255 undergraduates at the Federal University of, Abeokuta (FUNAAB). The study focuses on students across various faculties, departments and academic levels to ensure abroad representation not experiences with peer pressure and counselling interventions. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 30 respondents from all the 10 colleges/faculties within the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) to ensure equal representation across board. In all, a total of 300 respondents responded to the survey, but only 291 questionnaires were successfully completed. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire and it comprise do effuse sections.

Section A consists of the socio economic characteristic of the respondent (age, gender, faculty, etc). Section B consists of 12 items Socio-cultural Factors and Peer Pressure (questions on family background, cultural expectations, religious beliefs, and social media influence) scale adapted from a 25-item peer pressure questionnaire by Palani and Mani (2016) while section C is the Challengesandlimitationsofsocioculturalapproachesandcounsellingadapted directly from Ward and Kennedy's (1999) socio-cultural adaptation scale (SCAS). The above scales were pilot tested with 20 respondents from University of Ilorin to ensure its psychometric integrity with careful consideration of respondents of the same demography i.e Undergraduates. The reliability coefficients are as follows: $\alpha = .73$ and .79 for sections B and C respectively.

For the study's data collection, the questionnaire was administered to the students of FUNAAB electronically (Google form) for wider accessibility. The data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analyses include: Descriptive statistics was used to summarize demographic characteristics of the respondents while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression Analysis were also used to answer the two research questions.

Result

Socio demographic Characteristics

Table1: *Socio economic Characteristics of Respondents (N=291)*

Variable	**Category**	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**

Age Range	15–20	148	50.86%
	21–25	114	39.18%
	26–30	29	9.96%
Gender	Male	146	50.2%
	Female	145	49.8%
Marital Status	Single	273	93.8%
	Married	15	5.2%
	Divorced	3	1.0%
Academic Level	100L	64	22.0%
	200L	60	20.6%
	300L	53	18.2%
	400L	82	28.1%
	500L	38	13.1%
College	COLFHEC	30	10.3%
	COLBIOS	29	10.0%
	COLERM	29	10.0%
	COLPHYS	29	10.0%
	COLAMRUD	29	10.0%
	COLANIM	29	10.0%
	COLENG	29	10.0%
	COLVET	29	10.0%
	COLPLANT	29	10.0%
	COLENDS	29	10.0%
Religion	Christianity	144	49.5%
	Islam	146	50.2%
	Traditional	1	0.3%
Family Background	Nuclear	154	52.8%
	Extended	73	25.1%
	Single Parent	65	22.3%
Parental Education	No Formal Education	3	1.0%
	Primary	11	3.8%
	Secondary	108	37.1%
	Tertiary	170	58.4%
Household Income Level	Low	11	3.8%
	Middle	258	88.7%
	High	22	7.6%

The majority of respondents (50.86%) fall within the 15–20 age bracket, followed by 39.18% in the21–25agegroup,andonly9.96%arebetween26–30years.This indicates a relatively youthful and homogeneous undergraduate population. This aligns with typical university demographics, where most students are in their late teens or early twenties. The gender distribution is nearly equal, with males constituting 50.2% and females 49.8% of the sample. This balance suggests a gender - inclusive educational environment, minimizing gender bias in the interpretation of

findings.

An overwhelming 93.8% of the respondents are single, with 5.2% married and a minimal 1.0% divorced.Thisreflectsthedominantstatusofundergraduatesbeingyoungandlargelyunmarried, which is expected in a university setting. Marital status can influence time use, financial responsibilities, and mental health, which may affect study behaviour or wellness practices. Respondents are fairly distributed across academic levels, with the highest representation from 400 level (28.1%), followed by 100 level (22.0%) and 200 level (20.6%). The lowest representation is from 500 level(13.1%), likely due to program structures that end in four years or a smaller cohort in final year specializations. This distribution allows for the analysis of trends across different stages of academic progression.

The respondents for this study were drawn from ten academic colleges at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), ensuring a broad representation of disciplinary perspectives. As shown in the demographic data, each college contributed nearly equally to the total sample size of 291students. Specifically, COLFHE Chad the highest number of respondents at 30 students(10.3%), while all other colleges COLBIOS, COLERM, COLPHYS, COLAMRUD, COLANIM, COLENG, COLVET, COLPLANT, and COLENDS each had 29 respondents, accounting for 10.0% of the sample respectively.

More than half of the respondents (52.8%) come from nuclear families, while 25.1% are from extended families and 22.3% from single-parent homes. This suggests that while nuclear family structures dominate, a significant portion experiences diverse household dynamics, which may affect emotional support, financial capacity, and educational focus. A significant majority of fathers (58.4%)and mothers (42.3%) attained tertiary education, while 37.1% of father sand 49.8% of mothers stopped at secondary education. Very few parents had no formal education (fathers: 1.0%; mothers:1.7%). This suggests a generally well-educated parental background, which could correlate with the academic performance and aspirations of the respondents.

Most respondents (88.7%) come from middle-income households, while 7.6% belong to high- income and only3.8%to low-income brackets. This middle-class dominance may reflect broader economic trends among urban or semi-urban Nigerian under graduates and could influence access to resources, academic tools, and health care services.

Research Question One: What is the relationship between socio-cultural factors and peer pressure among FUNAAB undergraduates?

Table 2*: PPMC summary of correlation matrix showing the relationship between socio-cultural factors, group counselling and peer pressure.*

Variables	N	Mean x	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Peer Pressure	291	45.05	3.92	1.00				
Family Structure		10.71	1.89	-.157**	1.00			

Religious Belief	3.40	.88	-.277**	.283**	1.00		
Community Values	10.00	1.89	-.315**	.541**	.278**	1.00	
Cultural Expectations	8.82	2.01	-.210**	.437**	.184**	.460*	1.00

Source: field survey, 2025

Table 2 revealed the pattern of relationship between socio-cultural factors (family structure, religious beliefs, community values, and cultural expectations) and peer pressure among FUNAAB undergraduates; peer pressure reveals a significant negative relationship with family structure r(289) = -0.157, p< 0.05, religious beliefs r(289) = -0.277, p< 0.05, community values r(289) = -0.315, p< 0.05 and cultural expectations r(289) = -0.210, p< 0.05. Therefore, this indicates that there is a significant negative relationship between socio-cultural factors and peer pressure which is an indication that as socio-cultural factors increases peer pressure.

Research Question Two: What is the joint and relative contributions of socio-cultural factors and group counselling to the prediction of peer pressure among FUNAAB undergraduates?

Table 3: *Summary of regression for the joint and relative contributions of sociocultural factors and group counselling to the prediction of peer pressure.*

R =.725[a]
R Square =.526
Adjusted R square =.518
Std. Error =2.72122

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2349.285	4	587.25	79.305	.000[b]
	Residual	2117.838	286	7.405		
	Total	4467.123	290			

Models		Un standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1.	(Constant)	61.392	1.204		51.011	.000
	Family Structure	.188	.105	.091	1.790	.075
	Religious Belief	-.506	.194	-.113	-2.607	.010
	Community Values	-.182	.109	-.087	-1.668	.096
	Cultural Expectations	-.127	.092	-.065	-1.380	.169

Source: field survey, 2025

Table 4 revealed significant joint and relative contributions of socio cultural factors (family structure, religious beliefs, community values, and cultural expectations) to the prediction of peer pressure. When combined, the outcome produced multiple R-square values of 0.526 and multiple regressions coefficient of R = 0.725. The adjusted R square (Adj.R^2=.518) value indicates that the combined effect of socio cultural factors (family structure, religious beliefs, community values, and cultural expectations) explained 51.8% variation in the prediction of peer pressure. The additional elements that contribute to the residual variation are outside the purview of this investigation. The ANOVA result of the regression analysis indicates that socio cultural factors had a significant impact on the peer pressure of University undergraduates, $F_{(4,286)}$ = 79.305, P<0.05.

Regarding the relative contribution, table 7 also revealed that two (family structure and group counselling) factors are potent predictors of peer pressure. The most potent factor was religious

beliefs (β = -.113, t= -2.607, P<0.05). This implies that religious beliefs decreases the potency of peer pressure among undergraduates by 11.3%.

Discussion of findings

Research question one examined the relationship between socio-cultural factors and peer pressure among FUNAAB undergraduates. It was found that there is a significant negative relationship between socio-cultural factors and peer pressure. The negative correlations with family structure, religious beliefs, and community values suggest that strong socio-cultural foundations act as protective factors against peer pressure. This supports the Protective Factor Model of Resilience (Avcı, 2025), which posits that cultural and family-based values buffer individuals from risky behaviours. Therefore, students who uphold cultural values and have family support are less likely to succumb to negative peer influence.

Research question two examined the joint and relative contributions of socio-cultural factors to the prediction of peer pressure among FUNAAB undergraduates. The regression analyses in table 4 revealed that socio-cultural factors jointly explained 51.8% of the variance in peer pressure (Adjusted $R^2 = .518$). This is a substantial proportion, indicating that these factors are major determinants of peer pressure management. Among the predictors, religious beliefs ($\beta = -.113$, $p < 0.05$)emerged as the strongest contributor. These findings corroborate studies by Oduaran and Agberotimi (2021) and Protogerou et al., (2020), who found that counselling interventions significantly reduce risk-taking behaviours among undergraduates. Interestingly, family structure, community values, and cultural expectations were not statistically significant predictors when all variables were considered together. This may be due to overlapping influences or the dominant effect of group counselling in shaping behavioural outcomes. Nevertheless, their negative correlation with peer pressure indicates that they still play a protective role.

Conclusion

The study concluded that both socio-cultural factors significantly contribute to managing peer pressure among undergraduates. While family structure, cultural values, and religious beliefs provide a strong foundation for positive behavioural choices, religious factors emerged as the most influential factor in reducing susceptibility to peer pressure. Culturally sensitive counselling sessions were particularly effective in promoting self-esteem, improving interpersonal skills, and fostering resilience against negative influences. These findings affirm the importance of integrating counselling interventions with students' socio-cultural realities to enhance their overall well-being and academic success.

Recommendations

Based on there search findings, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Counsellors should undergo continuous training on cultural and religious sensitivity to ensure that interventions respect students' values and beliefs, thereby increasing

participation and effectiveness.

2. Higher institutions should develop initiatives that encourage parental involvement and community support to reinforce positive values that protect students against negative peer influences.

3. Elements of peer pressure management and emotional intelligence development should be incorporated into general studies or life skills courses to reach a wider student population.
4. Universities should establish systems to periodically assess the effectiveness of counselling interventions, using both qualitative and quantitative measures, to ensure continuous improvement and also facilitate peer mentorship and support groups that provide alternative positive social influences, reducing the dominance of negative peer pressure.

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HARNESSING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR ONLINE DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN COUNSELING: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) systems is rapidly transforming how conflicts are managed and resolved in digital environments. This paper explores the opportunities presented by AI-driven tools—such as automated negotiation platforms, chatbots, and predictive analytics—in enhancing the efficiency, accessibility, and scalability of dispute resolution processes. While AI offers significant benefits in reducing costs and expediting resolutions, its adoption also presents complex challenges including algorithmic bias, limited contextual sensitivity, and technological gaps, particularly in low-resource settings. Furthermore, the ethical and legal implications of delegating aspects of justice to machines—such as concerns around data privacy, accountability, and fairness—raise critical questions about the future of equitable conflict resolution. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, this paper provides a balanced analysis of the potentials and pitfalls of AI in ODR, and offers recommendations for its responsible and ethical implementation in legal and quasi-legal contexts.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Online Dispute Resolution, Ethical Implications, Digital Justice, Conflict Resolution, AI Ethics.

Introduction

Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) is an emerging field that harnesses technology for the purpose of settling disagreements between parties, often without physical contact. It initially emerged out of the realm of e-commerce but has since been adapted to broader legal, commercial, and interpersonal applications (Kaufmann-Kohler & Schultz, 2004). It is founded upon traditional Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes like mediation, arbitration, and negotiation but reconfigures them for the virtual world, building upon technology like video conference, secure messaging, and artificial intelligence (AI) platforms.

It has developed hand-in-hand with the expansion of use of the internet, electronic transactions, and the imperative for quick, cheap conflict resolution across physical lines. Interestingly, ODR has been an indispensable resource for the resolution of small claims, consumer complaints, and cross-border disputes where access to traditional court litigation is

inconvenient or costly (Rule, 2016). Online marketplaces like eBay and PayPal were amongst the first to use, handling millions of cases annually by virtue of automated and partial-automated platforms (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017).

There are several advantages of ODR, including reducing costs, speed, convenience, and

flexibility. It provides disputing parties with an alternative, less confrontational and collaborative stage, often allowing them to resolve grievances at their own place and pace (Sourdin, 2012). It also de-burdens court systems by shunting manageable cases out of formal courts of law into virtual platforms capable of handling large numbers of disputes.

There are, however, limitations. Critics of the approach propose that it might lack human empathy and nuance that is necessary for sorting out complex, emotionally charged disputes such as family law or labor relations (Wahab, Katsh, & Rainey, 2012). Further, due process, fairness, and digital literacy gaps generate concerns regarding the inclusivity and access of ODR systems, and these concerns amplify for developing countries.

Developments of artificial intelligence (AI) have, more recently, further transformed ODR by integrating smart technologies that can discern case merits, negotiate, or even give resolution proposals based on past records (Bellucci & Zeleznikow, 2006). Such applications increase efficiency but raise ethical and legal concerns of transparency, responsibility, and biasing of automatic decision-making.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly amplified the use of ODR globally, where courts and mediators were pushed to take proceedings online to maintain access to justice (Barton, 2020). Governments and legal institutions of countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and Nigeria launched pilots or intensified virtual courts and ODR platforms, marking a sea change in the delivery of justice for crisis and post-crisis contexts.

While popularity of ODR is quickly expanding, implementation varies significantly across circuits. In some, its official integration into legal regimes is present, but elsewhere, experimental or proprietary remains. Regulatory and institutional commitment, therefore, determines the credibility and sustainability of ODR practices (De Palo et al., 2019).

The future of ODR is integrated human and machine intelligence, where efficiency is set off against empathy. Hybrid models involving AI-augmented decision tools combined with human facilitation are emerging as the most promising means of maintaining fairness while benefiting from technology speed and economies (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017).

Emergence and Relevance of Artificial Intelligence in Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) entry into Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) is an influential paradigm shift in conflict management and resolution processes operating across online platforms. Initially, ODR platforms focused on simple communication platforms and case management, but recent advances in AI technologies (e.g., natural language processing (NLP), machine learning, and predictive analytics) have transformed ODR from a passive tool into an active, intelligent

participant in the dispute resolution process (Zeleznikow, 2021).

AI first entered ODR through decision support systems designed to help parties and mediators make informed, fact-based decisions. Early prototypes like Family_Winner and

Smartsettle used structured negotiation algorithms to suggest fair outcomes based on the preferences of the parties and legal rules (Bellucci & Zeleznikow, 2006). These tools laid the groundwork for more objective, transparent, and efficient mediation and arbitration processes.

As commerce, law, and communication became increasingly digitized, the role of AI in ODR has expanded. AI-powered ODR platforms now automate functions like dispute categorization, legal reasoning, and settlement recommendations. For example, eBay's Resolution Center uses AI to resolve over 60 million disputes annually, often without human intervention, by applying rules-based systems and analyzing past case patterns (Rule, 2016). This automation reduces time, cost, and the workload on human mediators or judges.

One of the most transformative features of AI in ODR is its predictive ability. Machine learning algorithms, trained on large datasets, can predict likely dispute outcomes based on historical patterns. This helps parties understand their chances of success and encourages early settlement by managing expectations (Sourdin, 2018). Court-attached ODR programs and LegalTech startups in countries like the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Canada are increasingly using such tools for pre-trial mediation and triage systems (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017).

Moreover, AI enhances access to justice for individuals who may face barriers like geographic distance, financial limitations, or a lack of legal literacy. AI chatbots and virtual legal assistants, like DoNotPay or LawBot, offer real-time, low-cost legal guidance and help users navigate disputes with minimal human assistance (Wahab, 2021). These tools are especially valuable in areas like consumer protection, tenancy disputes, small claims, and administrative complaints.

Despite its benefits, AI integration into ODR raises ethical and legal concerns. The "black box" nature of many AI systems makes decision-making opaque, which could undermine trust and perceptions of fairness. Additionally, biases in training data or algorithmic design can perpetuate discrimination or lead to unjust outcomes (Calo, 2016). To ensure procedural justice, it is essential to maintain algorithmic transparency, accountability, and human oversight.

Another ongoing debate is whether AI systems can truly understand the emotional, cultural, or relational nuances of disputes—factors crucial in resolving interpersonal and family conflicts. Therefore, AI should be viewed as a supportive tool, not a replacement for human decision-makers, enhancing efficiency while leaving room for human judgment and empathy (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017).

Opportunities in AI-Driven Online Dispute Resolution

The inclusion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platforms

has introduced several remarkable opportunities that are transforming how conflicts are handled in digital environments. These benefits include improved operational efficiency, broader access to justice, more consistent decision-making, and reduced costs. One of the most significant

opportunities is the automation of negotiation and mediation processes. AI-powered systems can simulate negotiation scenarios by analyzing parties' inputs and preferences, proposing settlement options, and even facilitating communication between disputants through virtual assistants or chatbots (Bellucci & Zeleznikow, 2006). These systems, often paired with decision-support tools, reduce the time spent by human mediators and enable quicker resolution of routine or low-value disputes.

Another advantage is AI's role in dispute triage and categorization. Advanced machine learning algorithms can process large amounts of dispute-related data, identify patterns, classify cases by complexity, and direct them to appropriate resolution paths. This helps ODR platforms streamline workflows and handle large volumes of cases more efficiently, especially in high-volume sectors like e-commerce and telecommunications (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017).

AI also enhances predictive analytics for outcome forecasting. By analyzing historical data from similar cases, AI tools can provide parties with likely outcomes based on legal precedents, dispute types, and other factors. This transparency helps manage parties' expectations and increases the likelihood of voluntary settlements (Sourdin, 2018). It also assists mediators and arbitrators in making more informed decisions based on data trends.

Cost-efficiency is another major benefit. Traditional litigation or face-to-face mediation can be expensive and time-consuming. AI-powered ODR platforms reduce the need for physical infrastructure, lower human resource costs, and shorten resolution timelines. This is particularly beneficial for individuals and small businesses that may not have the financial resources for formal legal proceedings (Rule, 2016).

Additionally, AI contributes to enhanced accessibility and inclusivity in dispute resolution. Virtual agents and user-friendly interfaces allow individuals with limited legal knowledge or those in remote areas to access justice without needing legal representation or traveling long distances. AI-based systems can also offer 24/7 service and multilingual support, making dispute resolution more inclusive for diverse populations (Wahab, 2021).

Finally, AI promotes standardization and consistency in resolutions, especially for repetitive disputes. By applying the same logic and analysis to similar cases, AI helps reduce human inconsistencies and subjectivity in decision-making. This is particularly valuable in areas like small claims, consumer complaints, and regulatory enforcement, where procedural consistency is crucial.

Automation of Negotiation and Mediation Processes

The automation of negotiation and mediation through Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a revolutionary shift in how disputes are resolved in digital platforms. Traditionally, negotiation and

mediation relied on human facilitators to guide parties through interest-based or rights-based resolution. However, with AI systems, much of this process can be modeled using algorithms that simulate negotiation behavior and recommend settlement options based on legal principles or

party preferences (Bellucci & Zeleznikow, 2006). AI tools utilize structured logic and decision-tree methodologies to analyze the positions of both parties and determine areas of overlap or compromise. These automated systems can engage disputants in real-time, prompting them to provide inputs on their interests, desired outcomes, and acceptable trade-offs. The system then processes this data and recommends a solution that is mutually beneficial and legally sound (Zeleznikow, 2021).

Platforms like Smartsettle and Family_Winner have demonstrated the success of AI in facilitating complex family and commercial negotiations. These systems don't just suggest outcomes—they guide users through each step of the negotiation, allowing for revisions, counter-offers, and final agreement drafting, all without the need for human mediators. This automation reduces human error and emotional escalation, two common obstacles in dispute resolution (Bellucci & Zeleznikow, 2010). One important feature of automated negotiation is its scalability. Human mediators are limited by time and capacity, but AI can simultaneously facilitate thousands of negotiations across jurisdictions. This is particularly helpful in online marketplaces and e-commerce platforms where mass disputes (e.g., customer complaints, seller disputes) arise frequently (Rule, 2016).

However, automation does have its limitations. While it excels in data-driven decisions, AI may lack the empathetic and relational sensitivity that some disputes—especially those involving personal or emotional matters—require. Therefore, many systems adopt a hybrid model where AI handles routine parts of negotiation and escalates complex matters to human mediators (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). Despite the challenges, automated negotiation and mediation are steadily becoming more accepted, especially in consumer disputes, tenancy issues, and small claims. As technology matures, these systems are expected to become more intelligent, adaptive, and user-friendly, creating pathways for faster and fairer dispute resolution processes worldwide.

Use of AI Chatbots and Virtual Assistants in Dispute Triage

AI chatbots and virtual legal assistants are increasingly employed in the triage stage of dispute resolution to handle initial case intake, categorization, and basic guidance. These tools rely on Natural Language Processing (NLP) to interact with users conversationally, collect information about their disputes, and direct them to appropriate resolution pathways (Wahab, 2021). Chatbots like DoNotPay, LawBot, and others offer users immediate responses to legal queries, assist in drafting legal documents, and guide users through the dispute resolution process. These tools are especially helpful for individuals with no legal training, as they provide plain-language explanations of legal rights, obligations, and available options (Calo, 2016).

One of the strengths of AI-driven triage systems is their ability to operate continuously

without fatigue. They can manage thousands of user interactions simultaneously, a feat that human staff would struggle to match. Additionally, they can detect keywords, classify disputes into categories such as employment, family, consumer, or landlord-tenant, and suggest tailored

solutions (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). In some court systems, AI-powered chatbots assist in scheduling hearings, filing documents, and preparing evidence checklists for litigants. This reduces administrative burden and accelerates the dispute resolution timeline. In doing so, virtual assistants improve overall efficiency, especially in overburdened or under-resourced justice systems (Sourdin, 2018).

Another benefit is the neutrality of bots in managing initial case interactions. Unlike human personnel who might exhibit bias or subjectivity, AI systems process each case based on input parameters, ensuring consistency and procedural fairness. This helps build trust in the resolution process, particularly among users wary of human bias (Zeleznikow, 2021). While AI chatbots are not yet sophisticated enough to handle complex legal reasoning or emotionally intense conflicts, they excel in routine interactions, basic guidance, and early-stage case triage. As their capabilities expand, they are expected to serve as the digital front line for dispute resolution services, particularly in online courts and administrative tribunals.

Predictive Analytics for Outcome Forecasting

Predictive analytics is a powerful AI capability that uses past case data to estimate the likely outcomes of new disputes. This feature allows parties to make informed decisions about whether to settle, escalate, or modify their dispute strategies based on evidence and trends. By forecasting dispute outcomes, predictive analytics enhances transparency and efficiency in resolution processes (Sourdin, 2018). These analytics tools work by training algorithms on large datasets of resolved cases. Variables such as case type, legal arguments, jurisdiction, and case history are used to detect patterns and infer probabilities of success or failure. For example, an AI system might predict the likelihood of a landlord winning a rent arrears case based on historical trends from similar jurisdictions (Calo, 2016).

Predictive tools are already being applied in legal systems globally. In the United States, platforms like Lex Machina and ROSS Intelligence assist lawyers in case evaluation and strategy development. In Canada and the Netherlands, courts are testing AI models to streamline small claims and civil case resolution using predictive analysis to encourage early settlements (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). This forecasting capacity is particularly useful in Online Dispute Resolution, where parties often lack access to legal advice. By using predictive tools, disputants can understand potential outcomes without expensive legal consultations. This empowers them to approach resolution with realistic expectations, which in turn reduces dispute escalation and increases voluntary settlements (Rule, 2016).

One of the major advantages of predictive analytics is consistency. Since algorithms apply the same logic across similar cases, the system minimizes human errors and judicial

inconsistency. It also helps in identifying systemic biases or anomalies in legal outcomes that can inform policy reforms (Zeleznikow, 2021). However, concerns remain about over-reliance on AI predictions. There's a risk that parties may view predictions as final outcomes, leading to reduced

negotiation or a chilling effect on legitimate claims. Therefore, predictive analytics should complement—not replace—professional legal judgment and human discretion in dispute resolution.

Cost-Efficiency and Increased Accessibility to Justice

Artificial Intelligence in ODR significantly lowers the cost of dispute resolution by reducing dependence on lawyers, court personnel, and physical infrastructure. Automation of administrative tasks such as case filing, documentation, scheduling, and communication drastically cuts the expenses involved in traditional litigation (Rule, 2016). AI systems streamline resolution timelines by eliminating bottlenecks caused by human workload, court adjournments, or procedural delays. Parties can access justice faster, sometimes resolving disputes in days rather than months. This is particularly beneficial for small businesses, individual consumers, and self-represented litigants who often cannot afford prolonged legal battles (Sourdin, 2018).

One of the most notable contributions of AI in ODR is its role in democratizing access to justice. Through user-friendly online platforms and multilingual chatbots, individuals from rural or underserved communities can access dispute resolution services regardless of physical location. This is a critical advantage in developing countries or regions with limited legal infrastructure (Wahab, 2021). AI tools can also bridge literacy and legal knowledge gaps by providing clear, step-by-step assistance to users. Automated systems can explain processes, generate legal documents, and even translate complex legal terms into simple language, allowing users to participate meaningfully in their cases (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017).

Cost-efficiency is further enhanced through flexible payment models offered by many ODR platforms. Some operate on subscription bases, while others use pay-per-case models. These alternatives offer predictable and affordable costs compared to traditional hourly legal fees, making legal services more accessible to low- and middle-income earners (Zeleznikow, 2021). Despite these gains, it’s important to address digital inequality. Users without internet access or digital literacy may be left behind. Thus, governments and legal organizations must invest in digital infrastructure, education, and hybrid models that combine AI tools with human support to ensure that cost-efficiency does not compromise inclusivity and fairness.

Challenges in Integrating AI into Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)

Despite the remarkable promise of Artificial Intelligence in enhancing Online Dispute Resolution (ODR), its integration into legal and alternative dispute processes is fraught with significant challenges. These hurdles range from technological limitations and data-related issues to ethical dilemmas and regulatory gaps, all of which require careful navigation to ensure responsible adoption and sustained public trust.

A major challenge lies in the lack of transparency and explainability in AI decision-making. Most AI systems operate through machine learning models that are often referred to as "black boxes" due to the difficulty in understanding how they arrive at specific outcomes. In the context

of ODR, this opacity raises serious concerns about due process and accountability, especially when an AI system suggests or determines outcomes that affect legal rights (Sourdin, 2018). For justice to be meaningful, disputants must understand the reasoning behind decisions, a standard not always met by opaque algorithms.

Another significant issue is algorithmic bias, which stems from the data used to train AI systems. If the training datasets contain historical biases—such as gender, racial, or socioeconomic prejudice—these biases can be perpetuated or even amplified in AI-driven outcomes (Eubanks, 2018). In an ODR system, this can result in unfair outcomes, eroding trust and potentially violating principles of equality before the law. Furthermore, biased algorithms may disproportionately disadvantage underrepresented or marginalized groups, thus contradicting the core mission of ODR to provide accessible justice for all.

Data privacy and security concerns also pose major challenges. ODR systems powered by AI often rely on vast amounts of sensitive personal and legal data to function effectively. This creates vulnerabilities related to data breaches, unauthorized surveillance, and misuse of information, particularly in jurisdictions with weak data protection frameworks (Wahab, 2021). Ensuring the confidentiality and integrity of user data is not just a technical concern but also a legal and ethical imperative, especially in disputes involving vulnerable populations.

A fourth challenge is the lack of standardization and regulatory oversight. There is currently no unified global framework guiding the development, deployment, and evaluation of AI in legal contexts, including ODR. As a result, there is great variation in the quality, fairness, and reliability of AI systems across platforms and jurisdictions (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). This regulatory vacuum undermines the legitimacy of AI-based decisions and complicates efforts to create cross-border dispute resolution mechanisms that are both fair and interoperable.

Technological disparities and digital literacy gaps also hinder the equitable use of AI in ODR. In many regions, particularly in developing countries, internet access, infrastructure, and user knowledge about digital platforms remain limited. This digital divide can prevent certain populations from benefiting from AI-driven ODR services, effectively excluding them from the online justice ecosystem (Sourdin, 2021). Even where technology is available, users may not trust AI systems or may lack the skills needed to navigate digital dispute processes. There is the challenge of professional resistance and institutional inertia. Many legal professionals, including mediators and judges, are skeptical of the accuracy, fairness, and ethical soundness of AI tools. The fear of being replaced by machines and the lack of familiarity with emerging technologies contribute to resistance against adopting AI-based solutions in traditional dispute settings (Ashley, 2017). Institutional reluctance to embrace innovation further slows down the integration of AI in

justice systems that are already burdened with inefficiencies.

Accuracy and Reliability of AI-Generated Outcomes

One of the foremost challenges in integrating AI into ODR is ensuring the accuracy and reliability of AI-generated outcomes. AI systems rely heavily on data-driven algorithms, and the validity of their outputs depends on the quality, quantity, and relevance of the data used for training (Ashley, 2017). When data is incomplete or unrepresentative, AI may generate outcomes that are erroneous or biased, leading to flawed dispute resolutions.

AI systems, particularly those using machine learning, are known to develop models that reflect patterns in training data. However, in legal and human-centric domains like ODR, such patterns may not capture the nuance and variability inherent in disputes. The inability of AI to consistently handle outliers, exceptions, and novel cases raises concerns about its dependability (Sourdin, 2018). An inaccurate decision in a legal dispute can have lasting social or financial consequences for the disputants.

Furthermore, legal disputes often involve emotional, ethical, or subjective elements that AI may oversimplify or misinterpret. While AI may predict likely outcomes based on precedent or patterns, it may overlook contextual cues or evolving interpretations of justice (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). This can compromise fairness, particularly in cases requiring empathetic or discretionary judgment. There is also the issue of over-reliance on algorithmic outputs. Users, especially those unfamiliar with AI's limitations, may accept AI-generated outcomes without question, assuming them to be objective and infallible. This is referred to as automation bias and can distort decision-making, especially in self-help ODR platforms (Wahab, 2021).

The reliability of AI is further tested during updates and retraining phases. Continuous updates are required to ensure relevance and adaptability, but they also introduce inconsistencies if not properly validated. If an AI system's logic changes without transparency, it becomes harder to ensure consistency in outcomes across cases (Djeffal, 2021). To mitigate this, there is a need for rigorous validation frameworks, human oversight, and continuous auditing of AI tools used in ODR. Without these safeguards, stakeholders will remain skeptical about trusting AI-generated results in resolving disputes.

Limited Contextual Understanding of Complex Human Disputes

AI's limited contextual understanding represents another critical challenge. Human disputes are not always logical or structured—they are often shaped by emotions, culture, values, and social dynamics that are difficult to quantify and code into algorithms (Eubanks, 2018). For instance, mediation relies heavily on empathy, rapport, and emotional intelligence—qualities that are currently beyond the reach of even the most advanced AI systems. While AI can analyze text and predict outcomes based on historical data, it cannot truly understand the underlying motivations, grievances, or interpersonal subtleties involved in complex disputes (Sourdin, 2021).

AI also struggles with implicit communication such as sarcasm, tone, and culturally specific

expressions, which are commonplace in disputes. This limitation can cause misinterpretation or poor judgment when AI attempts to process negotiation exchanges or assess statements in conflict scenarios (Ashley, 2017).

Moreover, in culturally diverse or multilingual contexts, AI may fail to grasp social nuances or contextual cues. This is especially problematic in international or cross-border ODR where language, etiquette, and legal expectations differ (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). The inability to adapt to such differences can alienate parties or cause misjudgment in settlements. Furthermore, ethical and moral reasoning—essential in family disputes, employment grievances, or restorative justice—require judgment that extends beyond code and data. AI lacks the consciousness or moral compass to interpret such intricacies appropriately (Djeffal, 2021).

To address this, hybrid models that combine AI capabilities with human judgment (human-in-the-loop systems) are recommended. These systems can leverage AI's data processing speed while still relying on human mediators to interpret emotional and contextual complexities.

Infrastructure and Technological Gaps in Developing Countries

A major barrier to effective AI-based ODR in the Global South is the lack of infrastructure and technological readiness. Many developing countries lack stable internet connectivity, sufficient computing resources, and affordable access to digital tools necessary to support AI-driven dispute resolution platforms (Wahab, 2021). This digital divide creates a justice gap, as those without access to robust infrastructure are effectively excluded from participating in AI-based legal services. For rural or marginalized populations, even basic ODR systems may be inaccessible, making AI-powered platforms impractical or inequitable (Sourdin, 2021).

Additionally, local ODR service providers in these regions may lack the technical expertise and funding to implement and maintain AI systems. Without the necessary skills or support, these platforms can fail, leading to user distrust and abandonment (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). Cybersecurity is another infrastructure-related challenge. Many countries lack robust legal and technical safeguards for data protection. Introducing AI into such vulnerable systems increases the risk of data theft, surveillance, or unauthorized manipulation of dispute outcomes (Eubanks, 2018).

Also, language barriers and low digital literacy in many parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America compound the challenge. ODR platforms powered by AI may not support indigenous or less widely spoken languages, and users with limited digital skills may find it difficult to interact with AI systems effectively (Wahab, 2021). Closing this gap requires global collaboration, capacity-building initiatives, and infrastructure investments. Governments and legal technology firms must ensure inclusive AI solutions that consider local realities and support digital justice for all.

Resistance from Legal Professionals and Traditionalists

The legal field is inherently conservative, and many legal professionals and traditionalists

express resistance toward the adoption of AI in dispute resolution. This resistance is rooted in concerns about job displacement, loss of professional autonomy, and skepticism over the competence of machines in handling legal reasoning (Ashley, 2017). Some legal practitioners

view AI as a threat to their roles, especially in mediation, arbitration, and even court processes. There is fear that widespread automation may reduce the demand for human expertise, undermining years of legal training and experience (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017).

Furthermore, there is concern about the depersonalization of justice. Traditionalists argue that human judges, mediators, and lawyers bring empathy, discretion, and values to the legal process—elements that machines cannot replicate. The preference for face-to-face deliberation over automated resolution remains strong, particularly in culturally sensitive or high-stakes disputes (Sourdin, 2018). Institutional inertia also plays a role. Many legal institutions have deeply entrenched procedures, and integrating AI would require systemic reform, including changes in policy, training, and court rules. This can be met with bureaucratic resistance or fear of disruption (Djeffal, 2021). Moreover, trust in technology remains a barrier. Legal professionals may distrust the accuracy, fairness, or ethical soundness of AI systems, especially those developed without transparency or stakeholder input. Concerns about accountability and liability further deter adoption (Wahab, 2021).

To overcome this resistance, education and collaboration are key. Legal professionals should be involved in the design and governance of AI systems to ensure alignment with legal standards and ethical values. Rather than replacing lawyers, AI should be seen as a tool to augment human decision-making and expand access to justice.

Ethical Implications of AI-Driven Online Dispute Resolution in Counseling

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into counseling-related Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) raises significant ethical questions that challenge conventional professional norms. In counseling, where trust, empathy, and human understanding are central, delegating parts of the resolution process to machines introduces concerns about the erosion of human judgment and emotional intelligence. AI systems, while efficient in processing data and offering logical outcomes, often lack the sensitivity to nuances such as emotional tone, cultural context, and relational histories that are vital in therapeutic and interpersonal conflict resolution (Wang & Siau, 2019). This limitation poses risks to the ethical principle of client-centered care and the foundational counseling values of empathy and respect. Hence, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) introduces a range of ethical implications that must be addressed to ensure fairness, accountability, and trustworthiness in digital justice systems. As AI tools increasingly influence or even determine outcomes in legal disputes, the stakes surrounding their ethical deployment grow significantly (Djeffal, 2021). These tools must be evaluated not just for their technical effectiveness, but for their alignment with core legal and ethical principles such as justice, transparency, and human dignity.

One of the most pressing ethical concerns in AI-driven ODR is the opacity of AI decision-making. Many AI models, particularly those utilizing machine learning, function as "black boxes," where even developers struggle to explain how outcomes are derived (Wischmeyer &

Rademacher, 2020). This lack of transparency can erode public trust in dispute resolution processes, especially when users cannot understand or contest the logic behind a decision that affects their rights or entitlements.

Closely tied to transparency is the issue of accountability. Traditional dispute resolution mechanisms include clear lines of responsibility—judges, arbitrators, or mediators are identifiable individuals who can be held accountable for their actions. In contrast, when AI systems err, determining responsibility becomes more complex. Is it the designer, the vendor, the platform operator, or the user who bears responsibility? The absence of clear accountability structures challenges foundational legal norms, including due process and legal remedy (Sourdin, 2021).

Another ethical dilemma is the potential for algorithmic bias. AI systems trained on historical data risk perpetuating and amplifying existing biases present in that data, such as gender, racial, or socioeconomic disparities. In legal contexts, this can result in unfair treatment or discriminatory outcomes, which contravenes principles of equality before the law (Eubanks, 2018). Moreover, since many AI systems are developed in contexts that reflect Western legal and cultural assumptions, their application in diverse global settings without localization can lead to ethical conflicts or marginalization of minority voices.

Consent and autonomy also raise ethical challenges. Many ODR platforms operate with minimal human interaction, prompting concerns about whether parties fully understand and voluntarily agree to AI-mediated processes and outcomes. This is especially critical in asymmetrical disputes—such as consumer-business conflicts—where one party may lack the technical literacy or legal knowledge to appreciate the implications of automated resolution (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). Ethical deployment of AI in such cases requires meaningful user education, options for human oversight, and informed consent mechanisms.

The broader concern is that over reliance on AI could result in a dehumanization of justice. Legal dispute resolution has traditionally been seen not only as a procedural matter but as a human-centered process rooted in empathy, discretion, and moral reasoning. There is an ethical risk that excessive automation may transform justice from a deliberative process into a mechanical one, reducing complex human conflicts to mere data points (Zouridis et al., 2020). This shift may undermine the relational and restorative dimensions of justice, especially in sensitive cases involving families, communities, or personal dignity.

Algorithmic Bias and Fairness Concerns

One of the most pressing ethical concerns in AI-driven ODR is algorithmic bias, which occurs when AI systems produce outcomes that reflect or amplify existing societal prejudices. These biases often stem from the data used to train machine learning models. If historical dispute

outcomes or legal decisions are biased—based on race, gender, or socio-economic status—the AI may perpetuate these inequities in its decision-making (Eubanks, 2018). In the context of dispute

resolution, such biases could systematically disadvantage certain groups, thereby undermining the principle of equal treatment under the law.

Bias can also emerge from skewed data representation. If certain populations or types of cases are underrepresented in training datasets, the AI may perform poorly when applied to such disputes. This is particularly problematic in cross-border ODR, where cultural, linguistic, and legal diversity must be respected. An AI system trained primarily on Western legal principles may not fairly or effectively resolve disputes in developing countries or marginalized communities (Djeffal, 2021).

Moreover, fairness concerns extend beyond outcomes to procedural justice. Users may perceive the process as unfair if they do not understand how the AI arrived at its decision or feel that their unique circumstances were ignored. Unlike human mediators or judges who can consider emotion, nuance, or cultural context, AI systems often rely strictly on data patterns (Zouridis et al., 2020). This lack of interpretive flexibility can result in rigid, impersonal judgments that may be perceived as unjust. Efforts to address algorithmic bias include auditing AI systems, using diverse training data, and implementing fairness-aware algorithms, but these approaches are still evolving and often lack transparency (Wischmeyer & Rademacher, 2020). Until then, the risk remains that AI in ODR may reinforce, rather than rectify, societal inequities.

Data Privacy, Confidentiality, and Cybersecurity

AI-driven ODR platforms require access to vast amounts of personal and sensitive data, including legal documents, testimonies, financial information, and communication records. The collection, storage, and processing of this data introduce significant privacy and confidentiality concerns, particularly in jurisdictions with weak data protection laws (Sourdin, 2021). Disputants may be reluctant to share full details of their cases if they are unsure how their data will be used or whether it may be exposed.

Cybersecurity is another critical concern. As AI systems are increasingly connected through cloud infrastructure, they become targets for cyberattacks. A breach in an ODR platform could result in the unauthorized disclosure of confidential negotiations or legal outcomes, potentially damaging reputations, altering legal standings, or causing emotional distress (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). In highly sensitive cases—such as those involving family law or workplace disputes—breaches can have long-term consequences.

In addition, AI systems must comply with data minimization and purpose limitation principles outlined in data protection regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Yet, many current AI-driven ODR platforms do not provide users with clear information on how long their data will be stored, who has access, or whether their data will be used to train future models. These practices create tension between technological advancement and users'

rights to privacy and control over personal information. The ethical management of data in AI-

ODR must therefore involve end-to-end encryption, secure authentication mechanisms, and transparent data governance policies. Without these safeguards, AI-ODR may lose legitimacy among users, particularly those from jurisdictions with strong cultural or legal expectations of confidentiality.

Accountability and Transparency in AI Decision-Making

The opacity of AI algorithms raises fundamental ethical questions about accountability and transparency in decision-making. In traditional legal systems, decision-makers (judges, arbitrators, mediators) can be held accountable through appeal mechanisms, judicial review, or professional oversight. However, when AI systems are involved in ODR, it can be unclear who is responsible for errors or injustices—the developers, the platform operators, or the end-users (Wischmeyer & Rademacher, 2020).

This issue is exacerbated by the use of black-box algorithms, which generate outcomes based on complex statistical models that are not easily interpretable by humans. Disputants may be unable to challenge decisions if they cannot understand the logic behind them. This undermines the principle of procedural transparency, which is essential to maintaining public trust in legal and quasi-legal systems (Djeffal, 2021).

Moreover, AI systems that evolve through unsupervised or reinforcement learning may deviate from their original programming in ways that are hard to monitor or control. If such a system makes an unfair or harmful decision, assigning responsibility becomes difficult. Legal frameworks in many countries are still underdeveloped in addressing such situations, creating a regulatory vacuum where ethical accountability is insufficient.

To improve transparency, some scholars advocate for "explainable AI" (XAI), which aims to make AI decision-making more understandable to non-experts. Others call for human-in-the-loop models, where human agents supervise and validate key AI decisions. Still, implementation of these practices is uneven and often resisted due to cost and complexity.

Regulation and Standards for AI Use in ODR

The absence of clear regulatory frameworks and ethical standards governing AI in ODR presents another major ethical challenge. While some jurisdictions have started to regulate aspects of AI—such as the EU's proposed AI Act—these laws are still in development and often do not directly address dispute resolution (Sourdin, 2021). Without harmonized standards, AI-ODR systems may vary widely in terms of quality, fairness, and user protection.

This regulatory gap allows private platform operators to set their own rules, which may prioritize efficiency or profitability over ethical considerations. In some cases, platforms operate across borders, complicating legal accountability and enforcement. Users in developing countries may be especially vulnerable to unregulated or poorly regulated AI-ODR systems that lack safeguards.

There is also a lack of professional guidelines for mediators, arbitrators, and legal

practitioners who use AI tools. Unlike traditional practice areas that are governed by bar associations or ethics committees, there is no universal body ensuring that AI-assisted dispute resolution meets minimum ethical and professional standards (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017). This regulatory vacuum risks undermining the credibility of the field. To address this, scholars and practitioners are calling for international standards, certification schemes, and ethical guidelines for AI use in ODR. These may include principles such as non-discrimination, transparency, human oversight, data protection, and right to appeal. Such measures will be crucial in ensuring that AI contributes positively to justice rather than creating new forms of harm or inequality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of Artificial Intelligence into Online Dispute Resolution presents a transformative shift in how conflicts are managed in the digital era, offering enhanced speed, accessibility, and efficiency in dispute resolution processes. However, these benefits are accompanied by significant challenges, including concerns about algorithmic bias, data privacy, lack of transparency, and the potential marginalization of human judgment. Addressing these issues requires a balanced approach that incorporates ethical frameworks, robust regulatory policies, and inclusive design. To ensure that AI-driven ODR systems uphold the principles of justice and fairness, interdisciplinary collaboration among legal experts, technologists, policymakers, and ethicists is essential for building systems that are not only technologically advanced but also ethically responsible and socially equitable.

Recommendations

- Policymakers and legal institutions should establish comprehensive guidelines to govern the use of AI in ODR, addressing issues such as transparency, accountability, algorithmic bias, and user consent.
- Legal professionals, technologists, ethicists, and sociologists should work together to design AI systems that are both technically robust and socially responsible, ensuring fairness and inclusivity in dispute resolution processes.
- Stakeholders involved in ODR—including judges, mediators, and legal practitioners—should receive continuous training on AI tools, their functionalities, limitations, and ethical implications to ensure competent and informed usage.
- Governments and institutions must invest in digital infrastructure and ensure access to AI-powered ODR platforms in underserved and low-resource communities to promote equitable access to justice.

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