

EFFECT OF NEGOTIATION SKILLS TRAINING ON MARITAL CONFLICT AMONG MARRIED TEACHERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ABIA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of negotiation training on marital conflict among married primary school teachers in Abia State, Nigeria. A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design using a 2×2 factorial matrix was adopted. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Twenty-four married teachers were selected from a population of 687 teachers identified with marital conflict cases in the state. The participants comprised 12 teachers in the negotiation training group and 12 in the control group. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed, and data were collected using the Marital Conflict Identification Questionnaire (MCIQ), a 30-item instrument developed by the researchers with a four-point rating scale. The instrument was validated by three experts from the College of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State. Data were collected in three phases: pre-treatment, treatment, and post-treatment. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) tested the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that negotiation training significantly reduced marital conflict, while gender showed no significant influence. Recommendations were made for counseling services and teacher support programme.

Keywords: Marital Conflict, Married Teachers, Negotiation Training

Introduction

Conflict, which refers to disagreement, often a prolonged one between a husband and wife, has been identified as a serious issue in many marriages. Ojukwu and Kadurumba (2014) defined marital conflict as a state of tension or stress between marital partners as couples attempt to carry out their marital roles. According to them, marital conflict stems from poor communication, lack

of intimacy, financial problems, and emotional distance that develops as life takes different turns. Conflict, as a form of disagreement, appears to be part of the daily lives of many couples because marriage provides a fertile ground for conflicts to emerge (Ojukwu & Kadurumba, 2014). This may arise from unmet expectations, differences in parenting styles, financial pressures, communication gaps, dominance by one partner, cultural differences, feminist perspectives, trust issues, sexual challenges, and other related factors.

Conflict can generally be described as a state of opposition. Sotonade (2018) defined conflict as a struggle for control over another person's behaviour or actions, noting that conflicts are inevitable in marital relationships. A disagreement in marriage becomes a conflict when it goes beyond normal intellectual differences and enters the emotional realm, leading to anxiety, anger, abusive language, and hostile behaviour. Marital conflict, therefore, refers to disagreement or incompatibility between spouses, especially when their goals, interests, and expectations diverge and become difficult to reconcile (Sotonade, 2018). The way couples manage conflict, rather than the conflict itself, often determines the stability and happiness of the marriage. Many marriages today are affected by persistent conflicts that sometimes result in separation or divorce. Although conflict may lead to hurt and emotional strain, it may also indicate that the relationship remains important to the individuals involved.

In marital conflicts, partners often compete for dominance, with power becoming a decisive factor in interactions. Ojukwu (2018) described marital conflict as a pattern of abusive behaviours or high levels of disagreement that significantly disturb the marital relationship. Research has shown that common areas of conflict among couples include financial management, housework, and sexual relations (Bryan et al., 2015). Justin, cited in Okwun (2021), viewed marital conflict as a situation in which a husband's or wife's desired goals are perceived as attainable by one partner but not by both, resulting in incompatibility, interactive struggle, and interference within the family system.

Regardless of the causes or areas of conflict, it is necessary for such conflicts to be resolved to ensure peaceful coexistence. This is because marital conflict has several negative consequences, including reduced happiness, economic instability, emotional stress, behavioural disorders, anxiety, and depression (Collins, 2013). In Abia State, several measures have been adopted to reduce marital conflict among couples, including counselling and advice from significant others such as church leaders, family members, and friends. Despite these efforts, the rate of marital conflict among married primary school teachers remains high and continues to affect their teaching effectiveness and service delivery in schools. This situation highlights the need to explore structured and professional intervention strategies such as negotiation skills training to reduce marital conflict among married teachers.

Negotiation plays a crucial role in building strong relationships and providing lasting and satisfactory solutions to conflicts while preventing temporary agreements that may lead to future disputes (Moustafa et al., 2025). Negotiation skills training involves structured interactions in

which individuals learn to communicate effectively, understand opposing interests, and reach mutually beneficial agreements. Regan (2013) described negotiation as a form of direct or indirect communication through which parties with opposing interests discuss and agree on joint actions to resolve disputes. He further identified various ineffective ways of handling conflict, such as giving in with resentment, using force, blaming partners, and avoiding confrontation, all of which often worsen marital conflict.

Kieren, Maguire, and Hurlbut (2016) suggested that effective conflict resolution strategies include compromise, agreement, reasoning, negotiation, active listening, and rational communication. Regan (2013) also identified key sub-skills necessary for effective negotiation, including agreement, empathy, observation, decision-making, emotional control, interpersonal skills, responsibility-taking, bargaining, and coexistence. Agreement involves freely accepting a partner's viewpoint without coercion, while empathy requires understanding the partner's feelings and perspectives. Observation helps individuals recognise and analyse situations accurately, while decision-making enables them to choose the best possible solution. Emotional control helps individuals manage their reactions, interpersonal skills enhance communication, and responsibility-taking encourages accountability for actions. Bargaining focuses on achieving mutual benefits without creating winners or losers, while coexistence encourages partners to accept and live with certain differences that cannot be resolved.

The researcher was motivated to investigate the factors that trigger marital conflict and identify practical solutions that could reduce such conflicts among married teachers. Effective management of marital conflict promotes maturity, mutual respect, and stability in marriage, which in turn enhances teachers' emotional well-being and improves their teaching effectiveness in schools. Since marital conflict affects not only individuals and families but also the wider society, it becomes necessary to equip couples with appropriate behavioural and negotiation skills. Therefore, this study examined the effectiveness of negotiation skills training in reducing marital conflict among married teachers in primary schools in Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 experience, coupled with the rapid increase in information and communication technology (ICT), contributed to increased domestic tension and violence among spouses and children, leading to a new wave of marital conflicts in many homes. During this period, many families experienced emotional stress, financial pressure, and communication breakdown, which intensified marital disagreements. In this context, negotiation skills became increasingly essential for managing and resolving conflicts in relationships. Literature abounds on the prevalence of marital conflict in modern society. Although conflicts are inevitable in marital relationships, the ability of couples to transform conflict into opportunities for building strong and lasting relationships remains a challenge. Many married teachers in primary schools in Abia State continue to experience marital conflicts that negatively affect their emotional stability, family life, and professional performance in schools. Despite the availability of

counselling and informal support systems, marital conflict remains prevalent.

There is evidence in literature that negotiation skills play a vital role in resolving interpersonal and marital conflicts. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of negotiation skills training in reducing marital conflict among married teachers in primary schools in Abia State, Nigeria. This gap in knowledge necessitated this study. Therefore, this study was designed to determine the effect of negotiation skills training on the reduction of marital conflict among married teachers in primary schools in Abia State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of negotiation on marital conflict among married primary schools teachers in Abia State. Specifically, the study sought:

1. To find out the difference in the mean score reduction of marital conflict among married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills and control at post-test.
2. To find out the effect of negotiation skills in the reduction of marital conflict among married primary school teachers based on gender.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the difference in the reduction mean score of marital conflict between married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills and the control at posttest?
2. What is the difference in the reduction mean score of marital conflicts among married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills based on gender?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance to further guide the study.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the reduction mean score of marital conflict between married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills and the control at post test.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the reduction mean score of marital conflicts among married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills based on gender.

Methodology

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design of pretest, posttest and control group using 1 2x2 factorial matrix. A total of 24 married teachers that were sampled from a population of 687 married primary school teachers identified to have cases of marital conflict in the state were used for the study. These comprised 12 married teachers each for negotiation training and control groups respectively. The study equally adopted multi-staged sampling. The instrument used for data collection was a 30-item questionnaire titled: Marital Conflict Identification Questionnaire (MCIQ). The instrument with 4-point rating scales were developed by the researcher and were

equally exposed to both face validation by three experts from the department Guidance and Counselling and Educational Measurement and Evaluation all from the College of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia State. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient was used to test the stability of MCIQ instrument which yielded indices of 0.84 and 0.85 respectively whereas their internal consistency was tested using Cronbach alpha statistic which yielded 0.74. Data were collected in three phases:

The data collection of the study was carried out basically in three phases:

Pre-treatment Phase: this phase involve two pre-treatment sessions conducted in the study, two weeks prior to treatment it involved preliminary introductions to the sampled married couples and the subject for the study. The phase carried our pre-treatment assessments in order to identify married couples with incidence of marital conflict using MCIQ to obtain the baseline data. The subjects were assigned to one treatment group and control group respectively (NST and control group).

Treatment Phase: This phase dealt with the actual manipulation of experimental conditions for two weeks group while the control group was waitlist group. The experimental group has eight sessions which last for one hour each. The researcher and the subjects choose days, time and venue for their meeting that lasted for two weeks. There were two sessions in each week. A description of the NST and a methodological outline of the session activities for the group were briefly stated below:

NST

First Session – Initial Counselling Establishment Issue

This was an introductory session. This session was for the establishment of rapport. The issue of confidentiality and other initial establishment issues were raised. This was followed with behaviour analysis of marital conflict and establishing awareness on the effectiveness of negotiation skills training and great potentials which it holds in reducing the problem of marital conflict.

Second Session – Empathy and Listening

This session commenced with motivational activities aimed at stimulating and sensitizing the subjects. There was review of previous session activities. Instructions on empathy were provided to the subjects on specific events such as addressing a group of people and responses was monitored, pointed out and discussed with the subjects.

Third Session – Observation, Acknowledging and Requesting

This session commenced with the review of previous activities, followed by the motivational issues to attract the interest of the subjects. The main significant discussion centred on observation, acknowledging and requesting as negotiation skills training therapeutic strategies. They were guided on the principles of observation e.g. Focusing on a speaker, acknowledging

and requesting e.g. showing appreciation, which teach ways to free flow of negotiation, happiness and fulfillment at home, work and life, and the negative consequences resulting from ineffective and inappropriate negotiation such as poor understanding or decoding of information.

Fourth Session – Decision making ability

This session commenced with the review of previous activities, followed by the motivational issues to attract the interest of the subjects. The main significant discussion centred on decision making ability as negotiation skills training therapeutic strategies. They were guided on the principles of decision making.

Fifth Session – Emotional Control

This session commenced with motivational activities aimed at stimulating and sensitizing the subjects. There was reviewed of previous session activities. Instructions on emotional control were provided to the subjects on specific events such as addressing a group of people and responses were monitored, pointed out and discussed with the subjects.

Sixth Session: Interpersonal Skills

This session commenced with motivational activities aimed at stimulating and sensitizing the subjects. There were reviewed of previous session activities. Instructions on interpersonal skills such as empathy, active listening and emotional intelligence. The subjects were guided to identify skills such emotional intelligence thereby helping them to keep their emotions in control and handling social situations with composure.

Seventh Session: Taking Responsibility

This was a joint session of both negotiation skills training managers and the subjects. It commenced with motivational activities, having welcomed the therapeutic managers.

Eighth Session – Conclusion and termination

This session commenced with motivational activities. The tasks and assignments were reviewed and assessed and necessary corrections made in the areas where negotiation skills training managers (counsellors and teachers) found difficult. They were reminded to come back after a week for posttest

Post-Treatment Phase

The post-treatment was carried after the last treatment session. The MCIQ was re-administrated to the subjects after reshuffling at the end of the experiment. The responses of the subjects were scored and result compared with the pre-test score of the subjects on MCIQ. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used as a statistical control measure. It also has the ability to increase the power of a statistical test and marital initial difference in the subjects. The

data collected for the study were statistically analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance as shown in t Tables 1-4.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the difference in the reduction mean score of marital conflict between married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills and the control at post test?

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation of the resolution of marital conflict among married primary school teachers' negotiation skills at Post test

Groups	N	Pre test		Post test		Mean Reduction	Mean Reduction difference
		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
NS	12	42.54	2.89	29.17	2.71	13.37	8.97
Control	12	41.09	2.73	36.69	2.80	4.40	

NS= Negotiation Skills

Results in Table 1 show that the marital conflict resolution means scores of married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills in the pretest was 42.54 with standard deviation of 2.89 and recorded a posttest marital conflict resolution mean score of 29.17 with standard deviation of 2.71. On the other hand, those exposed to the control group recorded a pre-test marital conflict resolution mean score of 41.09 with standard deviation of 2.73 and a posttest marital conflict resolution mean score of 36.69 with standard deviation of 2.80. While the negotiation skills group yielded a marital conflict mean score of 13.37 after the posttest, their counterparts in the control group had a mean reduction of 4.40. The marital conflict resolution mean difference of 8.97 was recorded for the two groups in favour of the experimental group that was exposed to negotiation skills in marital conflict. The standard deviation of each group ranged from 2.81 to 2.89; indicating that respondents were not too far from the mean and from one another in their responses which added further validity to the mean.

A corresponding hypothesis that addressed the above research question is:

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the reduction mean score of marital conflict between married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills and the control at post test.

Table 2: *Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of the reduction of marital conflict of married primary school teachers when Exposed to negotiation skills and Control at Post test*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	8062.394 ^a	2	4031.197	33.664	.000
Intercept	322.611	1	322.611	2.694	.000
Pretest	4119.351	1	4119.351	34.400	.000
Group	195.333	1	195.333	1.631	.027
Error	2514.691	21	119.747		
Total	84311.000	24			
Corrected Total	42512.374	23			

Result in the Table 2 showed that the calculated F-value of 1.631 and a probability value (Pp-value) of .027 were obtained. Since the Pp-value obtained is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the hypothesis of no significant effect was rejected and the alternate accepted. Therefore, there is significant difference in the marital conflict resolution mean scores of the married primary school teachers treated with negotiation skills and those in control group at posttest. This implies that exposing married primary school teachers to negotiation skills significantly reduced their incidence of marital conflict.

Research Question 2

What is the difference in the reduction mean score of marital conflicts among married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills based on gender?

Table 3: *Mean and Standard deviation of the Marital Conflict Reduction of Male and Female Married Primary School Teachers Exposed to Negotiation Skill*

Gender	Pre test			Post test		Mean Reduction	Mean reduction difference
	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	Score	
Male	6	41.41	2.58	28.89	2.37	12.52	0.11
Female	6	41.50	2.66	28.97	2.40	12.63	

Data in the Table 3 showed that male married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills obtained a pretest marital conflict reduction means scores of 41.41 with standard deviation of 2.58 and 28.89 with standard deviation score of 2.37 at the posttest. Also, the female married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills obtained a pretest marital conflict resolution mean score of 41.60 with standard deviation of 2.66 and 28.97 with

standard deviation of 2.40 at the posttest. The results equally showed that the male and female married teachers exposed to negotiation skills obtained marital conflict resolution mean scores of 12.52 and 12.63 respectively. The Table further showed that the female in-adolescent exposed to negotiation skills had a slightly higher marital conflict reduction mean difference of 0.11 than their male counterparts. The standard deviation of the two groups ranged between 2.37-2.66 indicating that the scores of the respondents were not too far from the mean and from one another in their scores.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the reduction mean score of marital conflicts among married primary school teachers exposed to negotiation skills based on gender.

Table 4: *Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of the Differences in Marital Conflict Reduction of Male and Female Married Primary School Teachers Exposed to Negotiation Skills*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	6441.239 ^a	2	3220.620	12.319	.000
Intercept	3293.016	1	3293.016	12.596	.000
Pretest	3661.217	1	3661.217	14.004	.000
Gender	988.941	1	988.941	3.783	.233
Error	2614.339	10	261.434		
Total	143226.336	12			
Corrected Total	23643.374	11			

From Table 4, it could be observed that an F-calculated value of 3.783 and a probability value of .233 was obtained. Since this P-value is greater than 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Hence, there is no significant difference in the marital conflict resolution mean scores of male and female married primary school teachers when exposed to negotiation skills.

Discussion

The study revealed that negotiation training significantly resolved the marital conflict of married teachers. This is evident from the result that married school teachers exposed to negotiation training had higher mean marital conflict resolution than those in the control group. The result agreed with the findings of the earlier works by Makinde and Ayeyika (2021) on negotiation skills training in resolving marital conflicts which showed that negotiation skills resolved the marital conflict irrespective with length of marriage. The results equally agreed with Ventis, Higbee and Murdock (2021) conducted a study on the effectiveness of negotiation techniques for fear reduction marital conflict and discovered that the negotiation techniques

reduced marital conflicts as effectively as more traditional techniques.

It was equally found from the study that Gender has no significant influence on the resolution of marital conflict of married teachers exposed to negotiation training since there was no significant difference in the mean resolution of the marital conflict of married teachers exposed to negotiation training. In other words, the marital conflict resolution was not as a result of their gender but due to the effectiveness of the treatment applied. The result corroborated with Odenike's (2019) study was on efficacy of silence and negotiation skills training on marital conflicts which revealed that significant differences were found in SST and NST in handling marital conflicts among the participants exposed to treatments than those in the control group $F(2,117) = 7.85; p < 0.05$; SST and NST were found to be effective and there was no significant difference in handling marital conflicts among participants exposed to treatment on the basis of age and gender.

Conclusion

It was concluded that negotiation training skills significantly resolved the marital conflict of married teachers. This was evidenced from the result that showed that married teachers exposed to negotiation training skills, had higher mean marital conflict resolution than those in the control group.

Gender had no significant influence on the resolution of marital conflict of married teachers exposed to negotiation training. This was shown from the study as female students exposed to the treatment had a slight higher mean marital conflict reduction score than their male counterparts which was not significant.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Counsellors should use negotiation training to reduce the cases of marital conflict by couples identified by them or those referred to them in their clinic.
2. Government should organize workshops, seminars and conferences to educate the teachers, and parents using professional counsellors on the effectiveness of the combination of negotiation training and social skills training in reducing marital conflict.

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