

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

STATE

Nwachi O. DON-CHIEDOZIE

*Department of Guidance and Counselling, College of Education
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia state.*

08060425056

ugoolive171@gmail.com

&

Spiff S. UGAMA

*Department of Guidance and Counselling, College of Education,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia state.*

08068036550

selinaugama@gmail.com

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

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,

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

Teacher Educators’ Perspectives on Emotional Intelligence and Community Conflict Resolution... **315**

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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INTEGRATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY: HUMANISTIC INTEGRITY, UBUNTU ETHICS, AND ETHICAL GOVERNANCE IN A DIGITAL ERA