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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

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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

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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)

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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*

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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

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	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.*

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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.

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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

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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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